Raber's and Penner's "History and Mission in Europe: Continuing the Conversation" - Book Review

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members. Other potential avenues to renewal are noted but not pursued, such as rejecting infant baptism to ensure more commitment from members as some East German Protestants have advocated.

Ziegler offers an excellent and accessible overview of Krötke’s substantial theological output, along the way demonstrating how the context of mass practical atheism both challenges and reinvigorates Christian theology. The biggest weakness of the book in my view is the lack of attention to the concrete social context of theological education in the GDR and to divisions within Protestant theology there. The main avenues of Krötke’s concern in this volume are Marxist thought and western theologians and other possible streams in the GDR were not addressed, despite the fact that the majority of pastors were educated in the theology departments of the six (not four as claimed by Ziegler) state universities, where it is claimed that theology could not thrive (1). Especially in Berlin the conformist approach of the theological faculty at Humboldt University was likely the veiled target of Krötke’s assertions about the need for a distinctly Christian witness, but this possibility is nowhere addressed. Likewise the difficult issues raised by the widely varying personal responses of Protestant individuals and leaders to state pressure are not addressed even in the section that deals with how to rebuild the church in the aftermath of Communist rule. All the same, this volume’s engagement with theology in the face of practical mass atheism is a good starting place for Christians and scholars who are interested in this challenge, one that is starting to sound more familiar to many in the west. Here we have an excellent opportunity to learn from the experiences of others who have for decades already been doing theology in a radically secularized society.

Reviewed by Mark Jantzen, Bethel College., N. Newton KS


History and Mission in Europe is a collection of twenty-one essays honoring the varied contributions and influence of Walter Sawatsky, particularly in Europe. As reflected in the title, Sawatsky’s work has focused on historical writings and mission activities. Hence, this volume is divided into three sections—history, missions, and future directions. He communicates in three languages: English, Russian, and German. Thus the essays are in these three languages—sixteen in English, three in Russian, and two in German. For the non-English chapters, there is an abstract in English. Moreover, most—but not all—the essays address issues relating to Anabaptist type churches and communities in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Russia.

Chapter one is the preface. In his historical writings and mission work, Sawatsky was careful to understand the historical and cultural context of his various activities. Chapter two, “Taking Contextual Influences Seriously,” addresses his various roles: church ambassador, church missiologist, and church historian. Chapter three, “A sower went out,” regards Sawatsky as sowing seeds of the good news of Jesus in various parts of the world. Chapter four begins the historical section. As the title indicates—“The Religious Life of the Mennonites in the Mid-1920s through the Eyes of the Soviet Political Police”—examines the religious policy of the Soviet authorities during the 1920s.

Unknown to many and often forgotten is the Mennonite self defense force in South Russia during the Russian Civil War. Chapter five, “The Selbstschutz: A Mennonite Army in Ukraine, 1918,” chronicles this experience. Chapter six focuses on theological education in Eastern Europe

Chapter eleven begins the mission section. “Elements of Post-Gulag Mennonite Theology,” depicts Mennonite theology as a product of a faith community. Next, “The Current Crisis in Protestant Theological Education in the Former Soviet Union,” describes the problems encountered by Protestant schools—declining enrollments and limited finances. Chapter thirteen, “From Mennonite to Anabaptist,” takes us out of Eastern Europe and looks at such developments in England. Next, as the title notes, “Patterns of Church-State Relations in Eastern Europe...” examines the various church-state patterns that have developed in post Soviet Europe. Chapter fifteen, “Doing Theology in Community,” details how theology is done. The next chapter—“Remembering the Russian Bible Commentary”—describes how the Barclay commentary has been received in Russia.


Any book with twenty-one chapters and authors has its strengths and weaknesses. Most chapters are well documented and fit the general pattern of history and mission in Eastern Europe. But several chapters are a stretch. They only marginally connect with the themes of the book. Having said this, History and Mission in Europe informs us of developments largely related to the free-church tradition in Eastern Europe and is worth a careful reading.

Reviewed by Richard Kyle, Tabor College, KS


This book is one of the occasional publications issued by the same scholarly institute in Niš, Serbia, that publishes the periodical Teme. This group consisting of mostly sociologists gathered around the key figure of Prof. Dragoljub Djordjević, often venture into areas not previously examined by Balkan scholars. In this case they are trying to provide insights into the one major branches of Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, which has not been explored as thoroughly as Catholicism and Protestantism. Some of the contributors bemoan the paucity of recent studies on Orthodoxy in the major languages and highlight that only James Payton (who is one of the regular contributor to REE and a former president of CAREE) had written a book, Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition in addition to a British publication, The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity.

The book consists of eighteen chapters grouped under three topics: I. Orthodoxy from a Legal-Political and Theoretical-Methodological Perspective, II. Orthodox Religiosity, Value...