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From Christian Worldview to Kingdom Formation: Theological Education as Mission in the Former Soviet Union

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die evangelikale theologische Ausbildung in der früheren Sowjetunion befindet sich in einer entscheidenden Phase ihrer Geschichte. Überall in dieser riesengroßen Region halten evangelikale Pastoren und akademische Leiter Ausschau nach jenen Visionen und Werten, die nötig sind, um einen neuen Kurs in eine ungewisse, aber spannende Zukunft vorzugeben. Dieser Artikel zielt darauf ab, eine Gesamtperspektive für theologische Ausbildung zu umreißen, die sowohl über eine Bildung von Weltanschauung als auch über eine praktische Ausbildung für den Gemeindedienst hinausgeht. Es wird das Argument vertreten, dass die Entwicklung eines kontextuellen missionalen Paradigmas, das dabei hilft, die evangelikale theologische Ausbildung und Mission in der früheren Sowjetunion anzuregen, heute eine der dringlichsten Aufgaben evangelikaler Theologie in einem slawischen Umfeld darstellt.

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SUMMARY

Evangelical theological education in the Former Soviet Union has reached a crucial phase in its history. Evangelical pastors and academic leaders throughout this huge region are seeking the kind of visions and values that are needed to navigate a new course into an uncertain but exhilarating future. The aim of this article is to outline the contours of a holistic vision of theological education that goes beyond both worldview formation and practical training in church activities. It is argued that the development of a contextual missional paradigm that could be used to invigorate evangelical theological education and mission in the Former Soviet Union is one of the most urgent tasks of evangelical theology in Slavic contexts today.

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RÉSUMÉ

L'enseignement théologique évangélique dans l'ex-Union Soviétique a atteint une phase cruciale de son développement. Les pasteurs évangéliques et les responsables académiques de cette immense région du monde sont en quête de la vision et des valeurs qui permettront de frayer une voie nouvelle vers un futur incertain mais réjouissant. Cet article vise à dessiner les contours d'une vision holistique de l'enseignement théologique qui irait au-delà de l'élaboration d'une vision du monde et de la formation pratique aux activités ecclésiales. L'auteur soutient que l'une des tâches les plus urgentes pour la théologie évangélique dans le contexte slave est l'élaboration d'un paradigme missionnel contextuel qui pourrait donner davantage de vigueur à l'enseignement théologique et à l'œuvre missionnaire dans l'ex-Union Soviétique.

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1. Introduction

In his thought-provoking article in a recent issue of the *European Journal of Theology*, Johannes Reimer laments the lack of an 'appropriate Evangelical missiology for the Slavic world'.[1] Reimer argues convincingly that such a missiology must arise out of 'a continuous conversation between Scripture, a discerning community of believers and the socio-political context in which mission is being done'.[2] He calls upon evangelicals to engage in dialogue with Orthodox believers to develop a transformative missiology appropriate to

the post-Soviet context.[3] Following a well-trodden path in recent scholarship, Reimer decries what he calls the 'mixed blessing of Western assistance'[4] and claims that the dominance of Western thinking and practices has left the evangelical churches in the Former Soviet Union (hereafter FSU) ill-equipped to face the missiological challenges.[5] Reimer makes the crucial point that the churches in this region urgently need a contextual theology that connects with the spiritual, social and economic realities of the communities within which evangelicals live and work.

Building on Reimer's insights, this article is written in the conviction that the challenges confronting theological education and mission in the FSU can best be addressed not merely by developing new strategies or even by dreaming new visions; rather, what is needed above all at this time is a renewed focus on the central component of the mission of Jesus as depicted in the gospels: *compassion*.[6] Visions and aspirations come and go, but gospel values endure. Visions and grand strategies must be sustained by a clear set of values derived from gospel principles that are lived out in the context of a community (κοινωνία) that is characterised by service (διακονία) and compassion (ἀγάπη). This argument is simple and may even sound naïve and not particularly 'academic' or 'scientific', but in the flurry of missionary enthusiasm that followed the downfall of communism and the so-called 'triumph of the West',[7] it was easy to lose focus on the simple message of Jesus' compassion. In an earlier contribution to the debate, Reimer maintained that the early evangelical Protestant missionary movement in the FSU focused too much on planning and executing programmes. Instead of responding with compassion to the needs of local people and building the Kingdom of God in contextualised ways, many Western missionaries created what he disparagingly calls an 'evangelism industry'.[8] According to some critics, considerable missionary energy was expended on obtaining outcomes that were important to Western funding organisations, but which had little positive impact on the local populations of believers in the FSU.[9]

If the evangelical churches in the FSU are to offset the trend of decline and deterioration, they must learn from the mistakes of the churches in Western Europe, and develop radically new ways of living missionally in the rapidly changing cultural context. If they are to develop a contextually appropriate missiological paradigm, then Slavic evangelicals must not uncritically adopt the categories and concepts that have dominated the missiological discourse in Western Anglophone settings. Rather, as Reimer rightly insists, Russian and Eastern European evangelicalism will need to 'collect its own mission-historical memory'[10] to engage with the scriptures and to develop a post-Soviet missiological paradigm that will invigorate the missional practice of the Slavic evangelical churches. This article is offered as a contribution to an ongoing conversation concerning the characteristics of an appropriate missiology for Slavic evangelicals.[11]

2. The need for a contextual missiology

Contextual theology teaches that shifts in theological paradigms invariably occur against a background of broader cultural change. Contextual theological engagement occurs not when theologians posit theories from their armchairs, but when communities of believers ask the question, 'What would be a meaningful and empowering gospel message for the particular people in this specific culture that God has called us to serve in this particular region?' Contextual theology seeks to impart the gospel 'in the light of the respondent's worldview and then adapting the message, encoding it in such a way that it can become meaningful to the respondent'.[12] One of the most persistent themes of scholarship on mission in nations of the Former Soviet Union has been the lament over the lack of contextualisation of theological curricula and missional practices and methodologies.[13] Surveying the recent literature produced by Slavic evangelicals themselves on this issue, one of the most common themes in these writings is that of 'crisis'.[14]

Addressing this lack of a contextual post-Soviet missiology, theological education should, accordingly, be directed towards equipping people to relate effectively to the hopes, fears, anxieties and aspirations of the local people whom it serves. The first task of mission is not to build churches but to plant the seeds of the gospel by creating community. When Jesus came to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, he did so not by establishing an institution, but by building community and by reaching out to those who, for various social, political and economic reasons, were marginalised. Whereas mission was once understood as synonymous with 'evangelisation' and 'planting churches', there is now a widespread acknowledgement that mission encompasses a whole range of vocations

and gifts. Mission is nowadays acknowledged as a task that involves not only proclamation, but also community and service.[15] Mikhail Cherenkov, a young Ukrainian Baptist philosopher who has arguably done more than anyone else in recent years to develop a robust contextual Slavic missiology, insists that the evangelical communities of the FSU require a new missional paradigm that 'responds to the needs and questions of people beyond the walls of the Church'. Moreover, this paradigm must be able to serve as a 'matrix for appropriate theologies' and 'bring together the inner world of the church and outer world of culture, overcoming the spiritual and social dichotomy'.[16] On the way towards mapping the contours of a transformative contextual missional paradigm, this article will draw on archetypes from the recent history of the FSU in order to illustrate the transformative potential of an integrated vision of 'theological education as mission'.[17]

The aim of theological education is not to produce narrow academic specialists who can become experts in a minute area of Christian theology, as determined by Western practices of micro-compartmentalisation of theological research. Rather, the goal is to teach a holistic knowledge of God's work of salvation so as to imbue in students such a sense of missional vocation that they will be inspired to participate in God's plan to save the world through the redemption wrought in Christ and realised by the Holy Spirit.[18] The development of a holistic vision of theological education is particularly pertinent to Eastern Europe and the FSU. The notion of compartmentalisation tends to be alien to the Eastern Slavic mind-set which, as distinguished commentators from Berdyaev to Zernov have noted, inclines more towards integration than to atomisation of segments and components.[19] Moreover, the contextualisation of mission and theological education will necessitate a radical overhaul of the individualist modes of evangelisation that were exported to Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia by Western missionaries following the demise of the USSR, but which were unsuited to the communitarian context of the FSU.[20]

3. Worldview versus integral formation

Another unfortunate aspect of the importation of North American educational approaches to Eastern Europe and the FSU since the early 1990s has been an over-emphasis on the concept of 'worldview' and a concomitant neglect of the integrated formation of character that determines one's pre-critical orientation to the world.[21] Conservative evangelicals from North America have defined 'worldview' as 'a tapestry of interdependent ideas, principles and metaphysical claims that are derived from the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures'.[22] It has further been argued that, 'If the Christian worldview can be restored to a place of prominence and respect at the university, it will have a leavening effect throughout society.'[23] The task of theological education was thus said to consist in forming students in '*the* Christian worldview' through the teaching of abstract principles pertaining to Christian ethical norms and metaphysical postulates, supposedly derived from Scripture.

The basic problem with an educational approach which has as its primary goal the induction of students into a Christian worldview is that it is possible for learners to obtain intellectual cognition of Christian concepts in a way that does not shape their pre-critical orientation to life as embodied beings in the world. Over-reliance on 'worldview' can lead to a reductive presentation of Christian faith as a system of propositional truth claims rather than as a comprehensive mode of being that radically alters one's material participation in the world.[24] Theological education must be concerned not only with the 'life of the mind',[25] but also with the formation of hopes and passions and the transfiguration of the imagination in ways that correspond to the Kingdom values of the gospel, which 'evoke a radically transformed life of loving enemies, giving away worldly goods, and standing up against injustice'.[26]

This is not to suggest that 'worldview' is not an important aspect of formation or that the intellect, like the imagination, does not need to be transformed. But as James Smith rightly maintains, 'human beings are not primarily "thinking things" and cognitive machines'.[27] Moreover, Ernst Bloch claimed that to be human is to hope and that volition is determined primarily not by intellectual abstraction, but by vision and hope and an underlying 'passion for the possible'.[28] If we accept that, 'behind every pedagogy is a philosophical anthropology',[29] and that to be human is to hope, then it follows that theological education must go beyond inducting students into a Christian worldview through the impartation of facts and concepts and should take seriously the role of dreams, visions and the imagination as basic realities governing human volition.[30]

The need for an integrated transformative conception of theological education is even more critical in the Former Soviet Union. The idea of an armchair theologian engaging in detached academic speculation is alien to the philosophical orientations and historical experience of the Slavic peoples. There has historically been a bias towards 'practical philosophy' to the extent that, 'Pure philosophy, in the sense of exclusively theoretical inquiry, never flourished in Russia.'[31] Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) explained that for those living in the shadow of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, which asserted 'an indissoluble union between theory and practice', the ultimate sin was the attempt to distinguish between 'philosophy and politics, between speculation and social building'.[32] He castigated the 'limitless social day dreaming, with no connection with actual reality', which he found in the intellectual life of parts of Europe.[33]

4. The Soviet system and its legacy

The Soviet system likewise inherited this long-established disdain for abstract theorising and the aims of Soviet philosophies of education went far beyond inducting students into the worldview of Marxism-Leninism. This becomes immediately apparent when one reads the Soviet atheist textbooks for students and teachers.[34] Examples of such works include a dense textbook, entitled *The Cultivation of an Active Atheist Position among Young Students*, published by the Soviet authorities in 1982:

> The Communist Workers Party regards education as an important front in the struggle for communism. One of the objectives of its programme is the holistic formation of the individual and the development of the whole character, subject to the conditions and requirements of the communist society, and the ability to make use of all communism's material and spiritual blessings. ... Organising the construction of a new society and purposefully carrying out this process, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has created a coherent system of communist education for all workers, covering all social strata and groups, and using every form of economic, political and, above all, ideological influence on the masses.[35]

In addition to the repeated use of the term '*всесторонний*' ('holistic' or 'comprehensive', *lit.* 'all-sided') in its description of the educational task, the book consistently argues for the need for active participation in communist practices that will change people's material reality. Another Soviet tract, entitled *Atheistic Education in Higher Learning*, published in 1982, elucidated the main aims of communist education in terms of inculcating active and comprehensive participation in the building of socialist values:

> ... through a system of higher education in our country many millions of Soviet youth representatives and new generations of educators are being trained through active labour and political activities to become the creators of new cultural values.[36]

The Soviet system of education was concerned not merely to change students' worldviews, but aimed additionally at the development of 'socially active, spiritually rich, harmoniously developed character[s]' through the comprehensive transformation of people's material practice.[37]

Although the Soviet Union no longer exists as a political entity, the Soviet aversion to abstract theorising remains an important characteristic of post-Soviet intellectual life. That being the case, evangelical theological education should relinquish its fixation with questions of knowledge and worldview and should instead be conceived as a holistic and integrated task that is directed towards the transformation of those 'material practices that shape the imaginative core of our being-in-the-world'.[38] The efforts of Christian institutions of higher learning in the Former Soviet Union should, accordingly, be directed towards not merely producing thinkers with a Christian worldview, but forming agents with a Kingdom mission. As Smith notes, 'the end (*telos*) of Christian education is *action*: the Christian university is a place from which students are *sent* as ambassadors of the coming kingdom of God'.[39]

The crucial point is that the centralised Soviet education system recognised what one commentator calls 'the supremacy of experience over purely theoretical constructions'.[40] Education was directed not so much towards forming people in a Marxist-Leninist worldview, but rather was aimed at equipping them to participate actively and energetically in the building of a utopian communist society in ways that were concrete, tangible and materially transformative. Berdyaev maintains that the communists' search for 'a synthetic philosophical system wherein all theory and

practice shall be indissolubly unified' was 'admirable in many respects'. Tellingly, Berdyaev argues that Christians '*must do the* same – but in quite another name'. Just as the Communists aimed to produce 'a new man, a new psychic entity', so too, according to Berdyaev, should Christians put their hopes in 'the birth of a new man'.[41] The term 'new man' was promoted by Marxist-Leninist ideology in the form of the 'new Soviet man' (*Новый Советскийчеловек*),[42] a concept developed to promulgate the idea of a new generation of people who would be endowed with Soviet virtues of discipline, selflessness, hard work and intelligence as a result of being nurtured in a Soviet culture and formed according to the material practices of Marxism-Leninism.[43] Ironically, this term has subsequently been lampooned by some post-Soviet commentators as depicting a new type of human being[44] known as *homo sovieticus*,[45] which is characterised by a degraded sense of self-worth, a distorted code of ethics and a deformed social conscience.

On first view, it may seem perverse even to suggest that Christians in post-Soviet countries today could learn from the methodologies of Soviet ideologues from the communist past. However, like a rebel army that captures the weapons of an tyrannical oppressor and uses them against him, post-Soviet Christians might also be able to adapt some of the educational philosophies of the Soviet Union in order to understand the importance not only of changing students' worldviews, but of transforming their material practices in ways that serve the building of the Kingdom of God rather than the Marxist-Leninist utopian society. And although the atheist-materialistic ideological content of the Soviet education was flawed, the methodologies pursued by Soviet pedagogues were remarkably effective in so far as they were directed towards peoples' material practices rather than merely focusing on abstract 'worldviews'. The Soviet authorities aimed to inculcate not intellectual acquiescence to an ideological system, but pro-active conformity to an applied social philosophy that would transform the material reality of those living under the system.[46]

5. AUCECB materials

As long as theological education was confined to the formation of a 'Christian worldview', the Soviet authorities perceived little threat to their ideological hegemony. It is therefore understandable why permission was granted to the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) in the 1960s to run a part-time theological correspondence course for trainee evangelical pastors. Topics included in the first curriculum were Christian Doctrine, Exegesis, Introduction to the Bible, Preaching, Pastoral Care, History of the ECB, and the Constitution of the USSR.[47] When one looks in more detail at the lecture notes for this AUCECB course, the theoretical content soon becomes apparent.[48] Apart from brief appendices containing summary biographies of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, no attempt is made to connect the material to the Russian or Eurasian context. It is possible that these lecture notes were in fact Russian translations of a work previously published in English, although it is not clear what the original source might have been. The lack of contextualisation of the topics covered in this course may also be attributable to the strict state censorship on all material used by the AUCECB under the Soviet system, but it nevertheless illustrates the point that some evangelical theological programmes, even before the collapse of the USSR, were largely focused on the formation of a 'Christian worldview'.

This is not to say, however, that all the Baptist training programmes were concerned solely with the issue of worldview. The courses appear to have been clearly focused on church practices, most of all on preaching. Alexander Popov, a young Baptist theologian who teaches at Moscow Theological Seminary, states that Baptist theological education in the USSR was 'first of all focused on training preachers and, secondly, it addressed certain specific questions about particular ministries in the church'.[49] Furthermore, Heinrich Klassen claims that the courses offered by the AUCECB in the time of the USSR were mainly concerned with mission (or witness).[50] Referring to Soviet Baptists, Klassen maintains that 'Christianity effected [*sic*] the daily life of members in Christian churches and presented [in] this way a danger for socialism.'[51] However, if this was the case, then judging by the content of the material for the AUCECB training programmes, this was in spite of – rather than because of – the training that Baptist leaders received from the Correspondence Course. Whether these initiatives were concerned with shaping students' worldviews or whether they aimed at improving competence in the performance of certain church practices, neither of these objectives translated into subversive social trans-

formation for the sake of the Kingdom of God. They posed no great risk to the authorities and were thus to some extent tolerated by the Soviet system.

Whereas these kinds of evangelical educational initiatives were tolerated by the authorities and even began to flourish,[52] those learning communities that went beyond the notion of 'worldview' or training in specific church practices and which aimed to instigate a transformation of the material reality of contemporary society through the development of a radical Christian anthropology were mercilessly – and often brutally – suppressed by the KGB. One such initiative was the Christian Seminar, which represented a contextual utopian vision that drew deeply from the wells of the Slavic literature, theology and philosophy.

6. Building a utopian community through education: the Christian Seminar

As a learning community that represented an attempt to embody 'God's truth in the language and culture of a people',[53] the Christian Seminar offers some important lessons for leaders of all churches and seminaries (evangelical and Orthodox) in the FSU. The Christian Seminar was founded by young Orthodox intellectuals in 1974.[54] Explaining its founding, one of the key early leaders remarked that

> As we were dissatisfied with the mere performance of a religious cult, had had no opportunity to receive a religious education and needed to establish brotherly Christian relations, we began in October 1974 to hold a religious and philosophical seminar.[55]

Concerning its ultimate goals, the Christian Seminar aimed to become part of a mass youth movement that would culminate in 'a new type of human community'. A document dating from 1979 expresses the utopian aspirations of those who founded the Seminar:

> We are all in need of a deeper and warmer type of communication: the force of active love must transfigure the world around us … It has become impossible to go on living in falsehood. An unbearably aimless existence in a frenzied world, dull attendance at useless jobs, meaningless debilitating disputes, faceless socialist culture, newspaper pathos and lies, lies, lies. Corrosive, destructive, humiliating lying motivated by fear, which some justify as caution, others as inevitability, others as wisdom … From the moment we are born, socialist culture presents us with a complete, finished, essentially absolutely false image of the world. This world, excluding tragedy, compassion and in effect all Christian values from life, sets the pattern of one's life from birth to death with the inevitability of fate.[56]

This vivid and lucid critique of life under Soviet communism can be applied just as pertinently to contemporary life under post-Soviet consumer capitalism. The eschatological language employed by the participants in the Christian Seminar has a profound resonance with some key themes in Slavic history and philosophy and the indebtedness of the Seminar's leaders to figures such as Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, Solovyov and Kavelin is apparent from their *samizdat*[57] publications.[58]

Despite their deeply pessimistic appraisal of their situation, the leaders of the Christian Seminar looked to the Christian faith, in particular to the peculiar synthesis of Christian eschatology and nationalistic messianism that was expressed in the so-called 'Russian Idea', associated with Dostoevsky and Solovyov:

> We feel that we are that living material out of which Christ will make all things new: a new community, a new culture, a new family, a new kind of man and a new kind of woman. Essentially, he is creating a new people out of us. But at the same time this is a return to the primal roots of the Russian national soul, which is trustingly thrown open to receive God's world and all the nations which live in it.[59]

Particularly noteworthy was the Christian Seminar's reliance on eschatological themes, which related to key elements of the literary and philosophical heritage of the Slavic peoples. Berdyaev wrote that

> there are two dominant myths which can become dynamic in the life of a people – the myth about origins and the myth about the end. For Russians it has been the second myth, the eschatological one, that has dominated.

He thus described Russians as 'a people of the end' (*народконца*).[60] Sergei Bulgakov likewise spoke of 'apocalypse' as the defining aspect of the 'sociology of our time'.[61] The Christian Seminar was thus able to contextualise its message and connect it with deep themes in Russian history. The literature produced by the Christian Seminar testi-

fies to the philosophical sophistication and theological erudition of its authors. It is perhaps owing to the erudition and sophistication of its academic content that the Christian Seminar never became a mass movement.

The Christian Seminar, however, represented a lucid critique not only of the Marxist-Leninist worldview, but also of the mundane material practices on which the existence of the whole Soviet system depended.[62] This critique drew heavily on the resources of Christian theology, particularly eschatology and utopia, and can serve as a model and inspiration for contemporary faith-based critiques of post-Soviet society. The essence of the social critique consisted in the indictment of Soviet society's neglect of human values that had been articulated by Russia's great literary and philosophical figures such as Dostoevsky, Solovyov and Berdyaev and which was encapsulated in such concepts as *mir* (peace or world)[63], *obschschina* (community)[64] and, above all, *sobornost* (universal brotherhood).[65] Bringing these concepts into material reality would result in a 'transvaluation of values' (*'переоценка ценностей'*) – a Nietzschean term used by the members of the Christian Seminar to depict a wholesale transformation of society that would undermine all the tacit assumptions and material practices upon which the continued existence of the Soviet system depended.[66] Perhaps recognising the grave threat to their ideological hegemony posed by these cultural critiques, the Soviet authorities suppressed these educational initiatives with disproportionate brutality that involved the detainment, torture and forced confinement to psychological correction institutions of their leaders.[67]

Christian institutions of higher education in the FSU today that are looking to go beyond the 'worldview' model of theological formation could learn from the example of the Christian Seminar. Future evangelical initiatives in theological education should not be based on Western models of evangelism that emphasise the imperative of individual conversions and which promote pre-packaged versions of Christianity that are designed to sell to mass audiences on an open consumer market.[68] By importing individualistic methods of evangelism, Western missionaries unwittingly created sub-groups of 'wannabe Westerners',[69] people who were attracted not only by the message of salvation in Christ, but also by the opportunity to escape the often difficult living conditions of post-Soviet society.[70] Theological education offered by Western missionaries in the FSU has been seen by many as a bridge between the poverty of post-Soviet society and the affluence of the Western consumer society.[71] In order to avoid the problem of a lack of integration of educational methods and local cultural contexts, Christian institutions of higher education in the FSU should recognise 'the cultural dependency of all forms of gospel witness'[72] and become outward-looking, boundary-pushing communities that infiltrate the surrounding population with the transformative message of the gospel. Such an approach to theological education would facilitate the process whereby the church, as Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch put it, lives out the gospel '*within* its cultural context rather than perpetuating an institutional commitment *apart from* its cultural context'.[73] Connecting this insight to the example of the Christian Seminar and applying it to contemporary models of theological education, the emphasis should be placed on the concepts of *mir*, *obschschina* and *sobornost*. In particular these concepts can be used to connect the message of the gospel with the realities of contemporary culture in regions throughout the FSU. Any initiative that were to be built on such a foundation would not merely be more relevant and applicable to the history and traditions of Eastern European Slavic cultures, but would arguably be much more faithful to the message of the gospel – a gospel which is concerned not solely with individual conversions, but also with the creation of redeemed communities of men and women inspired with a vision to transform the wider world for the sake of the Kingdom of God (Rev 11:15).

7. The limits of contextualisation

It may be objected that this article's allusion to generalised terms such as 'Slavic missional paradigm' and 'Eastern Slavic mind-set' contradicts the main argument concerning the necessity of developing contextualised models of mission and theological education in the FSU. While acknowledging the obvious diversity between the various independent nation states, many of which have their own distinctive cultures, histories and languages, we nonetheless think that they have much in common. The cultural and linguistic differences between, for instance, Russia and Belarus or between Ukraine and Bulgaria are relatively minor compared to the differences between any of these countries and the United Kingdom or the United

States of America. Therefore, even if a 'Slavic missional paradigm' cannot be applied uniformly to every context of theological education in the FSU, if such a model were applied in this way, it would still be immeasurably more in tune with the local context than a model imported from the UK or the USA. Moreover, although missiological challenges and opportunities are always shaped by specific local factors, they can be meaningfully addressed only by a creative application of timeless biblical principles and imperatives, such as compassion, which require careful, sensitive and creative application to specific contexts.

Contrary to the misguided assumptions of some evangelical critics, contextual theology is not about being conformed to or imitative of culture; rather, a truly contextual theology is a flexible paradigm that is rooted in the Scriptures and is able to provide a critical lens through which to refract contextual realities in the light of the gospel. Recognising that 'cultures differ significantly in their reception of the word of God',[74] contextual theology attempts to grapple with the question of what a meaningful and empowering gospel would look like for people in a particular culture or community.[75] As one Orthodox theologian helpfully remarks:

> In the same manner in which it was necessary for the Second Person of the Trinity to assume human flesh to communicate the message of salvation, the truth of God must assume a form in which the message of salvation can be communicated. The Living Word became incarnate; thus the written word must also become incarnate.[76]

Moreover, the notion that contextual theology, paradoxically, can and should be applied universally is predicated on the understanding that the gospel of hope and new life in Christ has universal and cross-cultural meaning. Therefore compassion, as the universal and timeless principle of the gospel message, must be applied and practised in specific contexts in order to address particular needs.

8. Learning from the past to re-imagine the future

One lesson that we learn from the history of theological education in the FSU since the collapse of the USSR is that there are no quick fixes to the current crisis. Such is the complexity of this vast issue that this article has inevitably left several questions unanswered. Among the issues not addressed here is the practical question of how a programme of theological education pursued along the lines suggested above could obtain meaningful accreditation. Given the resonance of the Christian Seminar and the concepts of *mir*, *obschschina* and *sobornost* with Orthodox theology, it may be possible for evangelical learning communities to move towards closer partnership with Orthodox theological seminaries.[77] Perhaps evangelical seminaries in the FSU could aspire to a meaningful form of internationally recognised peer-accreditation.[78]

This article has maintained that in order to chart the course for theological education in the FSU, it is necessary for evangelicals to situate themselves historically within the context of broader trends of their regional histories. The leaders of evangelical seminaries would gain considerable insight and wisdom from reading about the history, not only of their predecessors in the Baptist movement, but also of educational initiatives that originated out of different traditions, such as the Christian Seminar. Unlike the Bible Correspondence Course of the AUCECB – and in contrast to other previous short-lived evangelical theological residential courses established in the early years of the USSR[79] whose educational aims were limited to the training of pastors and preachers – the Christian Seminar offered a more comprehensive vision of holistic theological education. It is important that its vision should be revived and contextualised for the contemporary setting, because its social critique and profound connection to the history and spiritual reality of Russia and Eastern Europe are as relevant and necessary today as they were at the height of Soviet power.

Nevertheless, a valid criticism can be made that the Christian Seminar was too idealistic and utopian in its outlook and that its aims – i.e. building 'a new community, a new culture, a new family, a new kind of man and a new kind of woman' – would have been unfeasible, even in the most auspicious social and political conditions, and utterly impossible in the adverse context of Soviet censorship and oppression. The evangelical leaders of the AUCECB may have set out fairly limited educational aims (i.e. training pastors and preachers for ministry to local congregations),[80] but they were at least achievable, even in the unfavourable circumstances created by the Soviet regime. The challenge for the next generation of evangelical leaders in the education sector working in the regions of the FSU is to learn from the example

of groups such as the Christian Seminar and the AUCECB and to develop new and creative programmes of theological education that will equip people with the conceptual resources to engage in cogent philosophical critiques of culture (in the tradition of the Christian Seminar), whilst still attending to the immediate pastoral and missional needs of churches (as the AUCECB sought to do).

9. Conclusion

The salient question that arises from the foregoing reflection is a simple one: Would it be possible to combine 1) the idealism and passion of the Christian Seminar and 2) the attention to the immediate pastoral and missional needs of local churches demonstrated by the AUCECB with 3) the focus on the transformative dimensions of material practice evinced by the Soviet educational philosophies? In engaging with this question, the aim is not to adopt uncritically the methods of the past, but to re-envision them from the perspective of the Kingdom of God in order to invigorate mission and theological education in the FSU today.

It is clear that the development of a missional paradigm that can refract the real lived experiences, hopes and fears of the people and nations of the FSU in the light of the gospel is a most urgent task of evangelical theology in Slavic contexts today. In fulfilling this task, we must remember the tremendously high stakes involved: if the churches and Christian institutions of higher education fail to work together in developing an adequate social philosophy that can connect meaningfully with the material realities of their host cultures, then the nations of the FSU could be plunged into a new dark age. If, on the other hand, the churches can fulfil their vocation by becoming a transformative presence for the renewal of culture, then the evangelical communities of the FSU could lead the way towards building strategic outposts of the Kingdom of God throughout Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia. The hope that has inspired this article is that the generation of the students that I taught at Donetsk Christian University will be able to witness and experience a new movement of the Holy Spirit that will sweep through the nations of the FSU bringing new life, redemption, reconciliation, renewal and compassion in its wake.

Endnotes

1 Johannes Reimer, 'Recovering the Missionary Memory: Russian Evangelicals in Search of an Appropriate Missiology', *European Journal of Theology* 22 (2013) 137-148.

2 Reimer, 'Recovering the Missionary Memory', 138.

3 Reimer, 'Recovering the Missionary Memory', 145.

4 This term was also used in Mark Elliott, 'Theological Education after Communism: The Mixed Blessing of Western Assistance', *Asbury Theological Journal* 50 (1995) 67.

5 Reimer thus echoes the lament of Mikhail Cherenkov, who has likewise called for a renewal of evangelical mission and theological education along the lines of a theologically-robust and contextually-relevant post-Soviet missiological paradigm. See М.Н. Черенков, 'Постсоветские евангельские церкви в поисках подходящей миссиологии: Глобальные тенденции и местные реалии', *Богословские размышления* 12 (2011) 7-16.

6 Mt 9:36; 14:14; Mk 6:34; Lk 7:13, 10:33, 15:20.

7 Walter Sawatsky argues that it is possible that no other event in the history of missions generated as much hope and excitement among evangelicals as the collapse of the Soviet Union; see Sawatsky, 'Return of Mission and Evangelization in the CIS (1980s – Present): an Assessment', in Walter Sawatsky and Peter Penner (eds), *Mission in the Former Soviet Union* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld, 2005) 94-119.

8 Johannes Reimer, 'Mission in Post-Perestroika Russia', *Missionalia* 24 (1996) 16-39.

9 For a critical analysis of the role of Western missionary activities, see Mark Elliott, 'Theological Education after Communism: The Mixed Blessing of Western Assistance' in *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 3 (1995); Wes and Cheryl Brown, 'Progress and Challenge in Theological Education in Central and Eastern Europe', *Transformation* 20 (2003) 1. A very critical account of Western missionaries can be found in Johannes Reimer's controversial and provocative 'Mission in Post-Perestroika Russia'; a more balanced criticism is offered by Peter F. Penner in his introductory article in Penner and Sawatsky (eds), *Mission in the Former Soviet Union*.

10 Reimer, 'Recovering the Missionary Memory', 139.

11 It nevertheless remains the case that, ultimately, the details of this missiology must be developed not by Western missionaries, but by the evangelical communities within the nations of the Former Soviet Union. Rather than trying to impose Western models of mission and theological education onto FSU contexts, missionaries from North America

and Western Europe should use their creative gifts to encourage, empower and equip native Christian leaders to develop a contextual theology that connects with local people in transformative, life-giving ways.

12 Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003) 83.

13 Walter Sawatsky, 'Visions in Conflict: Starting Anew Through the Prism of Leadership Training Efforts', in Niels Nielsen (ed.), *Religion after Communism in Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) 13, 20.

14 See, for example, М. Н. Черенков, *Баптизм без кавычек. Очерки и материалы к дискуссии о будущем евангельских церквей* (Черкассы: Коллоквиум, 2012); Александр Жибрик, *Бог под арестом* (Киев: Книгоноша, 2012); С. С. Хоружий, 'Кризис европейского человека и ресурсы христианской антропологии', *Дать душу Европе: Миссия и ответственность Церквей* (Москва: Культурный центр, 2006) 41-49.

15 Vladimir Fedorov, 'An Orthodox View on Theological Education as Mission', in Peter Penner (ed.), *Theological Education as Mission* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld, 2005) 69-102.

16 Черенков, *Баптизм без кавычек*, 146.

17 The notion of 'theological education *as* mission' in the European context is developed from a variety of perspectives in Penner (ed.), *Theological Education as Mission*.

18 The Orthodox theologian, Anastasios Yannoulatos, writes that, 'Since the Christian mission is incorporated into God's mission, the final goal of our mission surely cannot be different from His. And this purpose, as the Bible ... makes clear, is the 'recapitulation' (*anakephalaiosis*) of the universe in Christ and our participation in the divine glory, the eternal, final glory of God'. See Yannoulatos, 'The Purpose and Motive of Mission from an Orthodox Theological Point of View', *Porefthendes* 9 (1967) 4.

19 This point is helpfully illustrated in Parush R. Parushev, 'East and West: A Theological Conversation', *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 1 (2000) 31-44. See also Einike Pilli, 'Toward a Holistic view of Theological Education' in Penner (ed), *Theological Education as Mission*, 171-184.

20 Steven R. Chapman, 'Collectivism in the Russian World View and its Implications for Christian Ministry', *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 6 (Fall 1998).

21 James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom. How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 13. The emphasis on 'Christian worldview' as the aim of theological education has been particularly prevalent in conservative evangelical or fundamentalist literature. For example, see D. S. Dockery and G. A. Thornbury, *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002).

22 Francis Beckwith, introduction to *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*, ed. Beckwith *et al* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004) 14; quoted in James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) 31.

23 J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) 2.

24 Pete Rollins refers to Christianity as 'a radical transformation that alters one's mode of being in the world'; see Rollins, *The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief* (London: SPCK, 2008) 95.

25 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 18.

26 Rollins, *Fidelity of Betrayal*, 100.

27 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 28.

28 Ernst Bloch, 'Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins', in Bloch, *Auswahl aus seinen Schriften* (Hamburg: Fischer, 1967) 41. The term 'passion for the possible' (*eine Leidenschaft für das Mögliche*) is found in Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (München: Kaiser, 1964) 15. This phrase is attributed originally to Søren Kierkegaard, see Paul Ricoeur, 'Freiheit im Licht der Hoffnung' in *Hermeneutik und Strukturalismus: Der Konflikt der Interpretationen* I, trans. Johannes Rütsch (München: Kösel, 1973) 205.

29 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 27.

30 John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity* (London: SCM, 1982) 3-4.

31 Frederick C. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (Tunbridge Wells: Search Press, 1986) 5.

32 Nicolas Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time* [1924], transl. by Boris Jakim (San Rafael: Semantron Press, 2009) 216.

33 Nicolas Berdyaev, *Origin of Russian Communism* [1937] (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960) 25. Although Berdyaev can be accused of overstating his case, many Western observers have likewise noted that since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, Western theology has been characterised by rational, historical investigation. The prevailing assumption has been that 'real theology' is concerned with the ancient texts and the systems that theologians have built for interpreting them. All other types of theology are derived from this 'pure' theology. So-called 'real theological scholarship' involves the study of how ideas and texts interact. On this basis of this notion, Western theology has tended to separate theory from practice. 'Applied theology' is regarded as a derivative pursuit that can be undertaken only after a long process of learning about biblical and historical

issues and after gaining a sound grasp of systematic theology. See Andrew Kirk, 'Re-envisioning the Theological Curriculum as if the *Missio Dei* mattered', in Penner (ed.), *Theological Education as Mission*, 22-37.

34 Many of these have been preserved in the Keston Archive which is now at Baylor University, Waco, Texas. There are even several illustrated textbooks that were clearly aimed at young children.

35 В. К. Танчер, *Воспитание Активной Атеистической Позиции Студенческой Молодежи* (Киев: Головное издательство, 1982) 3.

36 Н.А. Пашков, *Атеистическое Воспитание в Высшей Школе* (Москва: Издательство Московского Университета, 1982) 3.

37 А.Г. Конфорович, *Атеистическое Воспитание в Процессе Препожавания Математики* (Москва: Радянська школа, 1980) 3.

38 Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 12, 15.

39 Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 15.

40 Сергей Хоружий, 'Дело христианского просвещения и парадигмы русской культуры', *Высшее образование в контексте русской культуры xxi века* (ВРФШ: Санкт-Петербург, 2000) 31.

41 Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time*, 256.

42 The notion of transfigured humanity is also a key theme of Eastern Orthodox theology; see Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1968) 220-235.

43 Н.А. Бердяев, *Судьба России: Опыты по психологии войны и национальности* (Москва: Мысль, 1918, переиздана 1990) 196.

44 There are obvious allusions here to Ephesians 4:24, which reads: 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness' (KJV).

45 This term was invented by the prominent social critic, Aleksandr Zinovyev, in his book of the same title. See Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus*, transl. by Charles Janson (New York: Atlantic, 1986).

46 В.К. Танчер, *Воспитание Активной Атеистической Позиции Студенческой Молодежи* (Киев: Головное издательство, 1982); А.В. Белов, *Содержание и Методы Атеистического Воспитания Школьников* (Москва: Издательство «Педагогика», 1984); М.Е. Дуранов, *Атеистическое Воспитание Школьников: Вопросы Теории и Практики* (Москва: Издательство «Педагогика», 1986).

47 *Братский Вестник* 4 (1968) 77.

48 These notes can be found under the heading 'Нравственное богословие' in file <SU/Ort.15/18> in the Keston Archive.

49 Alexander Popov, 'The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as a hermeneutical community', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Wales, IBTS, Prague: 2010) 164.

50 Heinrich Klassen, *Mission als Zeugnis: Zur missionarischen Existenz in der Sowjetunion nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Logos-Verlag, 2003).

51 Heinrich Klassen, 'Mission as Bearing Witness – Immigrant Witness in Germany' in *Mission Focus* – Annual Review 14 (2006) 170.

52 According to one source (in file <SU Ort 15/18> of the Keston Archive), Leningrad Bible College, led by Ivan Prokhanov, helped to graduate more than 600 preachers and pastors before the Soviet authorities closed the college down in 1927. Between 1968 and 1980, the Keston Institute reported that 207 students had graduated from the theological correspondence course run by the AUCECB.

53 James J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 61.

54 Jane Ellis, 'USSR: The Christian Seminar', *Religion in Communist Lands* 8 (1980) 92-101. Michael Bourdeaux quotes the vivid impressions of one participant concerning the setting and content of the meetings of the Christian Seminar; see Bourdeaux, *Risen Indeed: Lessons in Faith from the USSR* (New York: St Vladimir's, 1996) 35.

55 Alexander Ogorodnikov, quoted in Michael Bourdeaux, *Risen Indeed: Lessons in Faith from the USSR* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983) 30.

56 Letter written by five members of the Christian Seminar to sympathisers in North America (November/December 1979) in the Keston Archive <Ort 21/1/80>.

57 '*Samizdat*', from the Russian word meaning 'to self-publish', referred to a miscellaneous variety of uncensored work on various religious, literary and journalistic topics and current affairs as well as some creative work such as poems and novels. *Samizdat* was written by dissidents in the USSR and often appeared in typed or mimeographed form. It was circulated clandestinely throughout the Soviet Union.

58 The second issue of the Seminar's *samizdat* journal, *Obshschina*, contained articles with such titles as 'The Ontological Problems of Russian Sophiology' and 'Konstantin Kavelin on Nihilism'.

59 Letter written by five members of the Christian Seminar to sympathisers in North America (November/December 1979) in the Keston Archive <Ort 21/1/80>.

60 Berdyaev, quoted in David M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 12.

61 Sergei Bulgakov, quoted in Jostein Bortnes, 'Religion', in Malcolm V. Jones and Robin Feuer Miller (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 125.

62 For a helpful recent account of the activities of the seminar that focuses on the biography of one

of its leaders, see Koenraad De Wolf, *Dissident for Life: Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

63 Gustav Wetter writes that 'it was only in the Russian people and their peasant institutions, the *Mir* and *Obshchina*, that the collectivist principles of an inbred solidarity were deployed to fullest effect'. See Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism: A Historical and Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) 64.

64 '*Obshchina*', often translated into English as 'community', can more accurately be rendered as 'the inborn spirit of collectivism'.

65 The term '*sobornost*' is more accurately translated by Boris Jakim as 'the authentic spirit of community'. See Berdyaev, *End of our Time*, 216.

66 The term '*переоценкаценностей*' was a translation from the German 'Umwertung aller Werte', which Nietzsche used in his *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1885). Alexander Ogorodnikov, used the term in his essay entitled 'Современная русская культура'. Keston Archive <SU / Ort 12>, dated 5th August, 1976.

67 Alexander Ogorodnikov, one of the main leaders of the Christian Seminar, was only 28 years old when he was arrested in November 1978. He was sentenced to a forced labour camp for six years, followed by five years' exile. A female founder member of the seminar, Tatyana Shchipkova, was likewise arrested in 1980, charged with 'malicious hooliganism' and sentenced to three years in a labour camp.

68 A lucid critique of consumer-orientated Christianity is offered by John Drane in *The McDonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity and the Future of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

69 Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 38.

70 Vasyl Markus, 'Politics and Religion in Ukraine: In Search of a New Pluralistic Dimension', in Michael Bourdeaux (ed.), *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1995) 171.

71 Scott D. Edgar, 'Faculty Development for Post-Soviet Protestant Seminaries: With Special Reference to Ukraine', *East-West Church Ministry Report* 17 (Spring 2009) 5. Others have commented on the brain drain of young evangelical leaders who have left the countries of the FSU and settled in Western Europe and the USA. See Anne-Marie Kool and Peter Penner, 'Theological Education in Eastern and Central Europe: Major Developments and Challenges since 1910' in M. Raber and P. Penner (eds), *History and Mission in Europe* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld, 2011) 92-93.

72 Curtis Freeman, 'Introduction' to James W. McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Volume 3: Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012) xxxii-xxxiii.

73 Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things to Come*, ix.

74 McClendon, *Witness*, 61.

75 See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004); Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002).

76 Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission*, 62.

77 For a helpful summary of the common ground between Eastern Orthodox Christians and Slavic evangelicals, see Mikhail Cherenkov's article, 'Evangelical Christians and the Orthodox Church', available online at http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert_thought/open_theme/40240 [accessed 1.4.2014]. For a more detailed analysis, see Donald Fairburn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes* (Louisville: John Knox, 2002).

78 The Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (EAAA) has already done excellent work in this area.

79 These initiatives are summarised in Popov, 'Evangelical Christians-Baptists', 162.

80 Popov, 'Evangelical Christians-Baptists, 164.