

## tf reviews

**Christopher J Wright**

***Truth with a Mission: Reading  
scripture missiologically***

(Cambridge: Cambridge Grove Books  
2005) 28pp.

This work, by a well-known Evangelical who has spent his life in the mission circles of the church while studying the Old Testament, is very much a Grove Booklet. It makes one wonder why the publisher has changed its name to Grove Books! It is brief in the extreme and there lies its strength and limitations. It is able to make strong points, which need to be heard about Christian mission. For Wright, the whole of Scripture

is missional, since it is not a case of trying to justify missionary activity out of limited proof texts. The Bible can be seen as the product of God's mission, when it arises out of God's own missional activity, covenant and command and, I would add, being. The promises to Abraham involve the mission, not just the receiving, of being a blessing to the nations. Thus, mission is not a solely New Testament concern, and here Wright reacts strongly against David Bosch, but the inevitable outcome of four pillars of Old Testament faith: monotheism, election, ethics, and eschatology. Furthermore Scripture mission

is the proper reading of Scripture. To follow the exhortation and example of Jesus and Paul, disciples need 'to read their Scriptures messianically and missiologically'. They require 'a messiah-focussed and mission-generating hermeneutic', since 'a messianic reading of the Old Testament has to flow on to a missiological reading' (p.9).

This booklet would be good as a basis for mixed ability group Bible Study and as an appetizer for mission for those who have not acquired the taste. We look forward to the more substantial work that this presages.

*Ben Knighton*

**Peter F. Penner and Walter W. Sawatsky (eds.)**

***Mission in the Former Soviet Union***

(Schwarzenfeld/Germany: Neufeld 2005)

The collection of articles, edited by Walter Sawatsky and Peter Penner, consists of papers read at the conference on 'Mission in the Former Soviet Union' (February 2003) at the International Baptist Seminary in Prague, focused on the special contribution by American Mennonite historian, Professor Walter Sawatsky, Elkhart, Indiana. His five articles constitute half of the collection. Sawatsky published his first volume on the *Soviet Evangelicals* as early as 1980 and is one of the world's leading experts on the history of Eastern European Protestantism. Other contributors are Peter Penner, professor of mission in Prague; Marina Karetnikova, St. Petersburg, Russia; Johannes Dyck, Lemgo, Germany; Mark Elliott, Wheaton, Illinois; and Viktor Artemov, St. Petersburg, Russia.

The articles offer a broad historical background to the post-Perestroika mission activities, starting from the beginning of Christianity in the Kievan Rus, thus putting Evangelical missionary activities into the broader framework of Christian mission in Russia (Sawatsky) and the historic developments of the 19th century (Marina Karetnikova), tracing the centrality of mission and evangelism in the theology of the Slavic Evangelicals to their historic roots (Sawatsky), the role of Scripture interpretation and distribution in the context shaping the missional identity of the Evangelicals in the region (Penner), and the special contribution to the missionary revival in the 1980s coming out of the Church Restoration Pattern laid by the Revival among German Evangelicals in the Soviet Union after World War II (Dyck).

Another set of articles covers the actual mission activities in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), critically evaluating both the practice of native Christian denominations (Penner, Sawatsky, and Artemov) as well as the Western missionary participation (Sawatsky, Penner, and Elliott).

In his closing article, Sawatsky attempts to discern the pattern of God's intended mission in the CIS.

All the articles in this very readable volume seem to agree that mission in the FSU can only be understood properly by taking the broader context of the whole church development in Russia and the Soviet Union seriously. This is a timely reminder in light of the chronic inability of the Western church to do contextually sensitive mission. Walter Sawatsky's article, "Centrality of Mission and Evangelism in the Slavic Evangelical Story," on the success and failure of the Co-Mission Project in the context of the historic background of the Church in Russia, is especially relevant here. It is a must read for Western missionaries interested in missions in and to the CIS.

Furthermore, Sawatsky and Penner argue that dialogue on mission inside the CIS and among all the churches involved in mission (Sawatsky), as well as with the foreign missionary agencies (Penner) is imperative, if the transformation of missions in the region is to succeed at all. I could not agree more! Both authors present their appeal for dialogue on mission to the Evangelical reader, which limits the use of the articles for conversation with other denominations in the region. It would have been very helpful to add such voices to the volume, though this was perhaps not the main aim of the conference in Prague.

Nevertheless, the articles invite engagement in such a dialogue, which has been a passion of Professor

Sawatsky for years. This book might bring his vision a step closer to becoming reality one day. The road toward the realization of that vision in the CIS, he suggests in his concluding article, is a dialogical, contextually sensitive, and transformative missiology, rooted in the concept of the *missio dei*.

The overview of missionary practice in the remainder of this volume is limited to a look at programs like education (Penner) and camping ministries (Artemov). The book's title, *Mission in the Former Soviet Union*, suggests a fuller introduction to the topic, than is realized. It would have been helpful to add to the volume a general overview of what different churches have done and are doing in missions today. Such an overview would have highlighted for the uninformed reader the need for the good analysis offered here by the authors. The reduction of the numerous difficulties Western missionaries face entering the CIS to the visa issue (Elliott), important as this may be, is also problematic.

These shortcomings, however, do not diminish the great value of *Mission in the Former Soviet Union* in providing a deeper understanding of God's mission in the FSU. All in all, the volume offers a good analytical tool, which will help to understand the genesis and direction of what has been called post-Perestroika missions in the CIS. All those interested in this part of God's story with His people ought to read the book.

*Reviewed by Johannes Reimer (University of South Africa)*

**Asghar Ali Engineer**  
***Muslims and India***

(New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House  
2006)

The book arises from the author's experience of being part of a religious minority attempting to find its soul in the context of the tension between an evolving secular-democracy and a supposed 'anti-pluralistic' and 'anti-minority' Hindutva politics. The central argument appears to be that the prevailing Hindu-Muslim conflicts are not necessarily a continuation of the medieval past but, rather, these conflicts owe to the modern Hindutva interpretation of the history and religion.

Engineer gives a number of examples of the composite Indian culture that the coming together of Islam and Hinduism created. All this appeared lost in the many riots and, in particular, in the aftermath of the Godhra incident in Gujarat (2002). Engineer maintains that in their response to Godhra, the Hindutva used other 'minorities' of Gujarat such as the Tribals and the Dalits against the Muslims. This, to Engineer, is an example of how the over 20-year Hindutva politics manipulates indigenous religions against minorities. Not everything is right with Muslim societies, however, who suffer from ignorance about the true meanings of the Sharia. The Muslim elite are potentially as susceptible to the abuse of politics as the elite Hindutva ideologues. Thus, it is the inter-mixing of religion and politics that is potentially explosive. The options are limited: either use 'secular discourse around real developmental issues' or make 'religion an option for the poor rather than for the powerful elite'.

The book suffers from a lack of

clear design and argument and could have been better edited (e.g. line 3, p. 49). It reads more like a collection of disparate lectures given over a period of time. For instance, the Introduction of the book primarily dwells on the 'myths' about Indian Muslims supposedly perpetuated by the Hindutva but does nothing in the book to seriously address this; also the intra-religious 'inequalities' that may be responsible for the construction of these 'myths' are not explored. The problem of Muslim women in Chapter 3 is an example of the incongruity in the structure of the book and perhaps should have been discussed along with chapter 7 where the author discusses particular issues facing Muslims – the resolution of which is possibly in the secular or joint religious discourse – triple divorce, communal riots, uniform civil code, Muslim personal law.

On the positive side: We know the problem of understanding religions and conflict is of contemporary relevance (Cf. Stone 1999, Appleby 2000, Jurgensmeyer 2000, Brombley 2002). In India, since the resurgence of Hindutva in the 80s, several scholarly works have attempted to present its critique especially in light of its impact on religious minorities and conflicts it purportedly generates (Cf. Hasan 1997, Narain 2001, Rajgopal 2001 & Larson 2001). As Hindutva and its politics' ante were raised through the 1990s and 2000, another genre of 'popular' writings reflecting the hardening of communal (inter/intra-religious) fault-lines also appeared. This book under review is part of the latter group of writings. It represents a marginal Muslim perspective with the author being twice removed from main-

stream Indian Islam: on account of being a strong supporter of secular democracy and in representing a minority Muslim sub-group within Indian Islam. But, despite this, the author (and his book) deserves to be acknowledged for his insights on the problem of the abuse of religion by the religious elite across religions, the promise of inter/intra-religious discourse on developmental issues as a ground for dialogue-joint action and the liberation of religion from the elite misuse of it.

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