

## CONVERSATIONS ON THE UKRAINIAN EVANGELICAL MISSIONARY SURGE OF THE 1990s

JOHN EDWARD WHITE. *FACTORS BEHIND THE UKRAINIAN EVANGELICAL MISSIONARY SURGE FROM 1989 TO 1999*. ISBN 978-1-5326-6541-7, 285 PAGES, PICKWICK (WIPF AND STOCK) PUBLISHING, EUGENE, OR, 2020. ISBN: 9781532665394; 28.80 USD

The book in hand is a fascinating study on Ukrainian evangelical missions on the territory of the former Soviet Union, including the Asian part of Russia called Siberia in the book. The book obviously is the author's PhD dissertation. It does not really indicate the institution that conferred the degree, but, as the outline and introduction immediately show, the actual dissertation text seems to be printed without adjustments of form and style. It would have improved readability to edit the PhD study to fit the genre of an academic book. As to the visual presentation of text, not only the technical form and layout of the dissertation are preserved, there is even no clear line between text and footnotes.

Definitions provided, starting with p. 4, do not include the term 'mission'. The definition of 'missionary' may include a hint as to what the author holds to be true of mission: mission is traveling for ministry and crossing various cultural and other borders. This then explains the author's statement in the introduction that the "evangelical church in the Soviet Union suffered greatly under communism and focused mainly on survival, not mission" (p.1). The concept of mission as witness and presence of a suffering church might be a helpful and necessary addition in this book, for a wider and clearer definition of the term. With a wider definition of mission, the study might have been more difficult to focus though. After all, the study discusses Ukrainian missionaries who during the researched period probably did not yet hold ideas and concepts of holistic mission, mission of God, etc. They traveled for ministry and were involved in witness and church planting in the region east of the Ural mountains.

This is a unique and very important research on the Ukrainian evangelical missionary surge with significant outcomes, as will be shown later in more detail. It compares the phenomenon with other missionary surges in history in other contexts and finds many commonalities. The book is a great asset for those interested in understanding the recent past and identity of Ukrainian evangelicals (esp. Baptists and Pentecostals) as well as the many churches, mission organizations and theological institutions which they have initiated and which still partially operate in eastern Russia. Especially during the current tensions between Russia and Ukraine, such study of mission work by Ukrainians on Russian territory is important in order to realize the benefits of working together in God's

cause. May it help to bring evangelicals of Ukraine and Russia together to continue the vision and mission of that early work of evangelicals in the former Soviet Union (fSU).

While the societal context of the nineties in the fSU and the Ukrainian evangelicals are presented quite objectively, a clearly noticeable western perspective is present. Possibly intentionally in order to provide a partially insider and primarily outsider perspective on the missionary surge. Obviously, the reading and interpretation of the sources follows western academic reading. Similar studies, if done by representatives of a Ukrainian university with a different academic approach and use of methodology, would look different. This has recently become possible and some PhD dissertations in theology and mission conducted by Ukrainians offer some materials to compare the difference in approaches. Both academic research traditions (Eastern and Western) are needed and complement each other.

The study offers many details from different areas to explain what made the Ukrainian missionary surge possible. It uses Grounded Theory and is built on solid qualitative research. A strong group of 50 respondents, directly involved with the phenomenon, provided the information for the study and helped develop helpful and reliable outcomes. Many of them by now are 60 and older and so it is very important to have their eyewitness accounts documented and analyzed in written form. White is able to present his findings as an amazing study of local indigenous mission work, especially its beginnings and development in the nineties. Missionaries from Ukraine were finally free to move and settle at different locations. Money played a secondary role at the early stages. The specifics of Baptist and Pentecostal involvement and impact are well presented and demonstrate that the same spirit of mission was moving different denominations. Motivation and vision that have caused these many people to move East and to get involved in missions beyond the Ural mountains are identified. The role of western missions and involvement and their impact on the Ukrainian missionaries are also included in a detailed and helpful way.

While the text was written during a time of rapid change in the political relations between Ukraine and Russia, which has also significantly affected relationships between evangelicals of these countries, it speaks of a different time and attitudes as displayed by missionaries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Ukrainian involvement in Russia and Central Asia needs to be understood as home mission, as there were no such strict distinctions yet between the successor states of the Soviet Union. This could have introduced a more balanced view of the recent past. At the same time, it is important for Russian evangelicals to recognize (in the way of appreciating, as this fact is obviously noted in the book) how much Ukrainians have invested themselves in developing churches and even theological institutions in Russia. A closer cooperation in various mission projects of both, Russian and Ukrainian evangelicals, will presently and in the future be most beneficial for both.

All mentioned shortcomings cannot overwrite the important work that this research presents. There is much value for western evangelicals to see how indigenous mission work was already happening in the former Soviet Union before western missionaries and mission organizations discovered Eastern Europe. Eastern evangelicals will through the study recognize the power of their own involvement in God's mission in spite of many

obstacles and chronic shortage of finances. The study abounds with many specifics and particulars, known only to insiders in the Ukrainian evangelical missionary surge, not available in other comparable publications. This makes it a valuable encouragement and model for researchers and practitioners alike.

At this stage I would like to highlight a few interesting and encouraging outcomes of the study as examples. Discussing denominational approaches, White writes: “I concluded that the Ukrainian evangelical missionary surge should be considered one surge and not two separate ones, despite the differences between the Baptist and Pentecostals” (p. 163). In the early nineties, these two evangelical groups were strictly separated by denominational lines but nevertheless show much common ground in mission. Coexistence and cooperation would have greatly helped to enhance God’s cause. Hopefully this book and its findings can continue to bridge between them.

The missionary surge was driven by the younger generation who looked for ways to serve and were inspired by the vision of returning missionaries and their reports. The potential of an enthusiastic and motivated generation even today must not be stifled. The uniqueness of the surge lies partly in the fact that it was driven primarily by nationals, differently to “other missionary surges in the region, which were more facilitated by foreign missionaries” (p.189). The study attempts a comparison with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but more in depth research would be needed in the future. Many mission and outreach activities were initiated by evangelicals, for instance, from Moldova and Romania. A comparison between the Ukrainian and Moldovan/Romanian surge might surface some helpful material for mission today and tomorrow.

White’s five C’s model – “centers for missionary development, change (rational and emotional sides), communication and facilitation agents and context” (p.189) – that summarizes the factors behind the Ukrainian evangelical missionary surge is very useful. The author acknowledges that such surges might be quite specific to a time and historical context but the model definitely needs to be taken into account as recommendation for present and future mission involvement. While many aspects depend on the dedication of faithful believers, some can be worked only by God at God’s proper time.

The book includes several helpful appendices which are a must-read in parallel to the main text. While Appendix B and C provide details of the qualitative study, Appendix A could qualify as an academic article or book chapter and provides a wide historical and international perspective (pp. 193-245). It is an in-depth literature-based overview of missionary surges, starting with the early monastic mission and closing with the CoMission surge in the former Soviet Union. The “CoMission surge”, in comparison to the Ukrainian missionary surge, had a much more powerful financial backing with many more involved, primarily western missionaries, but with much less impact in the region. This could be an interesting argument for indigenous mission, such as was the Ukrainian outreach on the territory of the fSU. Factors surfacing in historical surges are also compared to contexts close to Ukraine, such as Eastern and Central Europe, based on research done by Klingsmith and Thiessen. Appendix A seems to have been written before embarking on the Grounded Theory study as it provides its guiding categories; in the dissertation it probably followed the Introduction.

The literature list combines helpful western English and Eastern European materials which reflect and invite broad reading and indicate good resources for further study. As much joint work in this mission surge took place between Germans and Ukrainians, some research on the region and its mission work exists in the German language that would have added value to the study.

One can only hope that this significant work will be published also in the Ukrainian and Russian languages as it has so much to offer to evangelical communities in both countries. Before translation and publication some editorial work would be recommended in order to make the study even more attractive and read less like a dissertation.

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