

the impression of having been involved in the encounter, but, for the most part, more in the role of follower than of pioneering leader.

The Christian-Marxist dialogue may have run out of steam, as Dr Van Der Bent notes; but the encounter will persist. Indeed, it will grow: on the evidence of Eastern Europe, Marxism is not able to extinguish Christianity; and on the evidence of the Third World, more countries with large, growing churches are likely to "go communist". The number of people in Britain who are prepared to respond sensibly to this prospect is frighteningly small. We need all the help we can get to increase our understanding. The volume under review is part of a continuing study, and I hope, for all our sakes, that it will go on and develop.

DAVID M. PATON

Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union
Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869-1935) and the Way of the
Evangelical Christians and Baptists

(Evangelische Christen in Rußland und der Sovetunion)

by Wilhelm Kahle, Oncken Verlag, Wuppertal and Kassel, 598 pp., DM 26.

Unless an English translation of this book soon appears, only the lucky ones who read German will have access to the best book about the Evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union for the inter-war period. Kahle is a first-class historian with a growing list of articles contributed to journals and symposia. His book on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union (1917-38) was reviewed in this journal earlier (*RCL* Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 38-9).

Kahle's history of the Lutherans was a sad story of the collapse and virtual disappearance of a once thriving Church. In contrast, his new book maintains a surprisingly optimistic tone, even though by 1938 the Evangelical Christians were also in a sadly reduced condition. One source claimed that 60 per cent of the churches had been closed and confiscated, and 40 per cent of the leadership was in prison. Their leader till his death in 1934, Ivan S. Prokhanov, persisted in seeing everything through optimistic eyes. In his youth Prokhanov had contemplated suicide but was stopped. Soon afterwards he was converted, and ever since was driven by the optimism of faith. In his autobiography he stated: "The teachings of Jesus Christ exude a pure, crystal clear optimism. How can his follower be a pessimist?" When he was already abroad permanently, and when the facts of vicious persecution of his Church were overwhelming, Prokhanov persisted in hoping that things would soon change for the better.

Quite rightly Kahle begins and ends with the personality of this giant of the movement. What sort of man was it who could work as an engineer for Westinghouse till 1922 and at the same time found, organize and lead a union of Evangelicals that by 1917 numbered 100,000? His varied education obviously contributed to his uniqueness. He became fluent in many languages, and in the space of four years managed to study in Hamburg (Baptist seminary), Paris (University), Bristol (Stokes College), London (New Congregational College) and matriculated in theology at the University of Berlin. The breadth of his educational contacts and his unconventional behaviour were further shown when he was finally ordained a minister in 1924 in a Baptist church in Prague with clergy from the Czech Brethren participating. By that time he had already served 13 years as a vice-president of the Baptist World Alliance, although in his own country the efforts at unity with the Baptists were characterized more by acrimony than cooperation. Not long afterwards Prokhanov helped to damage relationships permanently by remarking that he would not die before he had stepped over the corpse of the Baptist Union. And yet one of his major contributions was to bring the Evangelical Christians, with their more flexible approach to theology and organization, to accept Baptist ways such as baptism, ordination of clergy and organizational structure.

Primarily the book is the history of a movement, with Prokhanov serving as the connecting thread. Kahle deals in depth with six major themes. He notes the multiplicity of roots from which the movement sprang, details the foreign influences – especially those of the mission societies – but notes the striving of Prokhanov and his followers to move beyond simply aping the western evangelicals to a Protestantism that felt at home in Russia. This concern partly accounts for Prokhanov's high esteem for his fellow Slav, Jan Hus. Unity seemed much more urgent than in the West, given the situation of persecution under the Tsars and later under the Soviets. Yet, although the striving for unity provides a major theme from 1909–26, one is struck by the increasing sharpness of the feuding between the Baptist and Evangelical Christian Unions. In Kahle's treatment the Baptist side of the argument suffers through less thorough analysis, but the picture of denominational rigidity and closure to other groups – most evident in the long-time Baptist leader Mazaev – is probably accurate. Prokhanov hoped to form a Protestant union embracing everybody, but finally wound up confronting a union with Baptists on Baptist terms. Had Prokhanov been able to surrender his own leadership role for the sake of unity, unity might have been achieved earlier. That is a standard Baptist argument, and Kahle helps the reader to see how amorphous the whole organizational structure was, how difficult it was for the Baptists to agree with each other. There were simply too many people on both sides with strong opinions which were shaped by personal experience rather than by the reflections of broad reading.

Less significant, but very interesting, is a section which gives details of the organizational structure of the Evangelical Christian Union, including Prokhanov's vision of a World Alliance.

The changing relationship of the Church to the State naturally forms a major dimension of the story. Kahle highlights the problem of conscientious objection and emphasizes particularly that pacifism was a grass-roots movement with majority support. Prokhanov was imprisoned, then heavy state pressure was put on other leaders, and finally the Union leadership went into reverse and counselled the members to fulfil their military obligations. But the members held out longer against governmental pressure than did the leaders. Some went over to the Pentecostals until the State extracted the desired obedience statement from the Pentecostals; others temporarily went into schism. Kahle notes that pacifist sentiments appear to give the present leadership cause for concern.

One of the unique contributions of Prokhanov was his positive response to socialism. He launched or encouraged numerous Christian communes and hoped to set up a model Christian city to be called Sun City or Evangelisk. Regrettably, although Kahle deals with Prokhanov's social thought, the social activism is handled rather sketchily. This is no doubt due to the paucity of documentation. Kahle also devotes lengthy sections to dogmatic and ethical practices, but the general significance of these themes is hard to measure because of the extreme shortage of trained preachers. The overriding emphasis on expansion pushed questions of dogma into the background in any case. Inadequate attention to a concept of the Church (which Kahle fails to discuss) also helped reduce the few communes that were established to primarily spiritual retreats instead of centres of social reconciliation.

Major factual errors are not apparent and the addition of copious footnotes as well as bibliography, name, subject, and geographical indexes makes the volume a reference treasure. Kahle has dug deeper in the records, searched more widely for possible sources, and asked deeper analytical questions than anyone has done so far.

WALTER SAWATSKY