

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary of the Discussion

It is commonly accepted that there is little or no Russian evangelical scholarship. This does not mean, however, that there is no Russian evangelical theology. Theology that was not put into writing or properly documented is still theology. If one can talk about Anabaptist theology or Brethren theology, then the author can talk about Russian evangelical theology. Alexander de Chalandeau, when writing about Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists' theology of the post-World War II period, made a good point: "as strange as it may appear, it is the mass of the believers and the pastors and lay-preachers who never write articles, but who guide the teaching of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist denomination" (Chalandeau 1978:299).

All evangelical groups in Russia in the period under consideration, and especially the Stundists and Pashkovites, searched the Scriptures mostly to discover "God's will" – norms that should regulate their Christian life. Intellectual achievement was never their goal. In their opinion, there were more important things to do because "the time was short". This attitude blended well with their hopes for the Second Coming and premillennialism. Actually, current events proved that their time was short indeed. All they had was a few decades before the movement was swept away in the tidal wave of Stalin's persecution aimed at the total elimination of all things spiritual and religious. Unlike the English Evangelicals who "at least for a while... remoulded British society in their own image" (Bebbington 1989:150), Russian evangelicals did not really have a chance.

So, Russian evangelicals had little time (as a young denomination), and little chance (due to persecution), and little desire (their attitude towards theologising had always been somewhat sceptical) to develop and write down their theology. These are the main reasons why their theology is not well reflected in written form. The mindset that viewed writing theology as unnecessary had been handed down to them as a legacy from the various pietistic movements that influenced early Russian evangelicalism. Perhaps their

position is best articulated by Spurgeon, who even today is one of the most popular and respected preachers among Russian evangelicals: “there is nothing new in theology except that which is false” (Bebbington 1989:146). Nevertheless, there must have been something “old” in theology that Russian evangelicals firmly stood for.

It is difficult, of course, to transport oneself into the world of the 1870s when the Bible was first made available to common Russian people in their native language. Recent converts were finding great joy in newly discovered biblical truths. Many of them overcame the barrier of illiteracy and quickly realised the freedom of reading and searching the Scripture for themselves. And as they did so, the Bible took on enormous significance for them. They regarded the Bible as the disclosure of God’s very will. To this belief they (including Kargel) emphasised the Holy Spirit’s assistance in the process of interpretation and application of Scripture. Another important feature was the great importance that they (as well as Kargel) placed upon obedience to revealed truths and following Christ. It should not be difficult therefore for anyone to understand why Russian evangelical churches rarely engage in doctrinal controversies regarding biblical authority.

To some degree Christian literature also played a part in forming the theological views of Russian evangelicals. That very same literature serves as a “litmus test” for revealing their theological range of interests during that period. It is not a coincidence that Christian writers such as Bunyan, Bersier, Farrar, Mackintosh, Drummond, Newman, Newton, Spurgeon, Moody, Torrey, Finney, and the like were favoured by Russian evangelicals, who did not get tired of translating and publishing their works. The books of these authors are by and large evangelistic, conservative in their approach to Scriptural authority, and often highlighting the Holy Spirit’s ministry, believers’ sanctification, and future events. Parenthetically, these were also key themes in Kargel’s writing; his reading, however, was more extensive because he knew several languages.

Gradually after the 1917 Revolution Russian evangelicals were finding themselves cut off from the world-wide evangelical debate. As atheism was coming to power and persecution was intensifying, the main issue became survival. It is safe to say that the Russian Evangelical movement did not change much theologically between the early 1930s until the time of *perestroika*. This fact was also noted by Nichols who wrote that “there is no change theologically

in the bibliography of the group as it progressed from Radstock to Pashkov and finally to the AUCECB” (Nichols 1991:88). Thus, Kargel has not become outdated; his writing still reflects Russian evangelical theology and hermeneutics. Furthermore, his works are being published and widely reprinted up to this day.

So, what is the Russian “brand” of evangelicalism? First of all, it is “evangelicalism” with its main marks: conversionism, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism. But it is also strongly coloured by pietistic strivings characterised by experientialism, religious idealism, Biblicism again, and opposition to the Establishment. Russian evangelicalism is a “sum vector” of Anabaptist-Mennonite, Brethren, British evangelical, Molokan, Stundist, and Baptist influences both theologically and practically. Notice that Baptist is only one of these components. This answers the question why “Baptists” in Russia differ from their Western namesakes.

Now, what was the shared ground in those foreign Brethren-Baptist-Mennonite influences that made them appealing to Kargel and to many Russian believers? What was the common denominator and why did that particular denominator happen to become so appealing to Russian people? The author believes that it was pietism in a broader sense of the word. The Pietistic approach must have been appealing to Russian people who had been brought up in the values of Russian Orthodoxy. *Blagochestie* has always been a highly prized quality among Russians. It was striving for piety that became the common ground between Western Protestantism and Russian Orthodoxy.

As a result we witness the phenomenon of Russian evangelicalism. All the above-mentioned evangelical bodies were in a sense pietistic; they were pietistic in their approaches to worship, personal life, and interpretation of the Scripture. And being of a pietistic disposition they did not become subject to rationalistic influences. Moreover, only this kind of approach would be able to sustain the Evangelical Christians-Baptists through the twentieth century. The biblical pattern of promise and fulfilment also gave them a solid foundation in the midst of their violent history. Hargroves wrote of the Russian Baptists of the mid-1950s: “Their approach to the Bible is not critical but reverential. It is the Word of God. It means what it says. It should be preached that way” (Hargroves 1959:254).

Even up to this day personal piety is emphasised among Russian evangelicals. For instance, great importance is attributed to prayer. Prayers are usually offered both before and after meals, seeking God's blessing not only on the food, but also requesting hunger for spiritual truth and nourishment for their souls. Evening prayers are offered kneeling by one's bed. Prayers often accompany arrivals and departures.

When "preaching the Word", "brothers" often emphasise obedience and faithfulness to God and admonish the assembly to read, study, and meditate upon the Word of God. Serious self-examination and the confession of sins is also encouraged, especially before the services with *khleboprelomlenie* [breaking the bread]. Believers strive to see the Lord's hand in everything that happens in their lives, and sometimes great meaning is attributed to the most trivial events of the day.

The historical succession between the Brethren tradition and the Evangelical Christians-Baptists was seriously violated after the Revolution, when the main carriers of the Open Brethren influence – the Pashkovites – dissipated within the Evangelical Christian churches. Nevertheless, although Russian evangelicals are by no means a replica of the Brethren, they share a number of obvious features.

Modern Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists have the office of presbyter which is linked to ordination (unlike the Brethren), but not necessarily linked to the completion of a course of theological studies (like the Brethren). This creates a serious gap between "academia" and "assembly" in present-day Russia.

As in the case of the Brethren, the Lord's Supper or "breaking the bread" is performed as the memorial of Christ's death "until He comes". The passage from 1 Corinthians 11 is read every time; however the Lord's Supper is observed monthly, not weekly. When a service falls on the first Sunday of the month it is centred on participation in the Lord's Supper.

The worship service, especially in smaller churches, follows the Brethren pattern where gathered believers can propose a hymn to sing and pray spontaneously. Russian evangelical meetings also include the recitation of Christian poetry. Even in larger congregations, worship takes the form of a series of sermons (including lay-preaching), spontaneous prayers spoken aloud

by believers, and hymn singing. All of these traditions can be found to some extent in Brethren worship (Darby 1972:142).

There is also the phenomenon of itinerant preaching (especially in the unregistered ECB churches), in which certain “ministering brothers” devote their lives to visiting various places and churches with the task of evangelization and teaching. Actually, this is what Kargel was doing for most of his life. Itinerant preaching is also found among the Brethren (Darby 1972:143).

Russian Evangelical Christian-Baptists (especially in unregistered churches) strongly believe in separation from the world. Like the Brethren, they often consider participation in the social and political life of the state contrary to following Christ (Darby 1972:144).

Most importantly, like the Brethren, Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists deem Scripture reading of great importance. Scripture is received as the Word of God Himself; the expression “the Word” is a synonym for the Bible. It is treated with great reverence (for instance, one can get scolded for laying Bible on the floor) and it is made the subject of regular studies: individual, in small groups, or as a special church event. The Russian evangelical approach (and Kargel’s) to the Scripture is reverential, not critical: the Word of God says what God means and it means what it says.

Thus, Russian evangelicalism was not nurtured in nineteenth century pietism for nothing. The search for godliness has always been and still is there.

In the course of the research it has been demonstrated that Kargel was connected in one way or another to all the main Russian evangelical bodies – Molokans, Stundists, Baptists, Pashkovites, Mennonite Brethren, and Evangelical Christians. He grew up in Molokan populated Tiflis, studied at Oncken’s Baptist seminary in Hamburg, ministered among the Mennonite Brethren, served as a Baptist pastor in St. Petersburg, considered Pashkov (a faithful follower and a theological “replica” of Lord Radstock) as his “spiritual father”, married a Pashkovite girl, worked as an interpreter for Open Brethren Dr. Baedeker, had his living quarters in the palace of a faithful Pashkovite lady – Princess Lieven. . .

However, Kargel started his writing career long after his initial contact with Pashkovites and the European religious developments from which they were drawing (that is, British Evangelicalism in general and the Brethren and

Keswick movements in particular). That is why his writings reflect more of the Brethren and Keswick piety than Baptist or Mennonite Brethren doctrine.

Considering Kargel's background, it is quite natural that his writings are replete with discussions about sanctification and future events. His approach to dealing with Scripture combined the classical Reformation high view of the Scripture, clear, self-explanatory, and whole (continuity between the Testaments); the Pietistic call for personal Bible study and the immediate practical outcome; the Anabaptist stress on obedience; and the Brethren typology and interpretation of future events. Like the Brethren, Kargel's writings are characterised by a constant appeal to the Scripture and by a warm devotional tone. He often bases his exposition on a particular passage, and then moves through the Scriptures in search of relevant passages. A distinctive note in Kargel's instruction is his stress on the work of the Holy Spirit, so typical of the English Evangelicals in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Close observation of the various formative influences in Kargel's life and a careful reading of his writings make it possible to restore the assumptions behind his interpretation of Scripture. Kargel believed that Scripture was inspired, authoritative, and understandable. He believed that the Holy Spirit could use the Scriptures to speak directly to believers. He believed that it is the Holy Spirit who makes the written words come "alive". He believed that Scripture could provide guidance for daily living. He believed that Scripture could lead believers towards holiness. Kargel attempted to hold together two emphases: giving freedom for the Holy Spirit to speak to the hearts of believers and recognising the importance of Bible study. Kargel believed that being receptive to new truths and being willing obey were the prerequisites of successful Bible study. This is how he viewed the nature of the Bible.

Now, what was Kargel's actual manner of interpreting the Bible? He considered the whole Bible authoritative and quoted from both Testaments. In search of evidence he freely moved from Genesis to Revelation. He read the text as divine and authoritative with obedience as the main objective, rather than to simply discover the "intended meaning" behind the text. Every book and verse was precious to him. Generally he was not concerned with critical questions of date or authorship. In the Bible he was looking for practical guidance along the way of holiness that would lead to heaven. Kargel rarely referred to sources other than the Bible; the Word was the only court of appeal

in matters of faith and practical life. He constantly called believers to read and search it personally. Normally, Kargel was satisfied by the literal sense of the Scripture, though a “spiritual” sense was also possible.

Overall, in Kargel’s approach to Scripture his starting point was faith and reverence, while the end goal was personal holiness. Thus, Kargel’s position can be defined as evangelical pietism. His ultimate objective in studying Scripture was to hear God speak and then to respond in eager obedience. His hermeneutical approach was also characterised by Biblicist piety: his main question could be reduced to, “What does God want of me today as I read His Word?”

Although the names Spener, Arndt, and Francke do not appear in Kargel’s writings, he appropriated some of their insights. It seems that their ideas came to him via the Open Brethren (Mackintosh, Soltau, Müller, Baedeker), and from Pashkov who inherited them from Radstock. There is a high degree of similarity in teaching and practical emphases, whether or not it was the result of direct influence.

Nevertheless, Kargel with all his pietistic tenets cannot be classified as a “Pietist”, a part of that historical movement. Certainly Russian evangelicalism was indebted to the pietistic movement, but it was an awakening movement with its own potential, not a copy of German Pietism of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. When looking for parallels, it should not be forgotten that Kargel was not “just like” Spener, or Müller, or Pashkov, or Oncken, or Wieler. Thus, all that can be established is an indirect link to the Pietists, and a direct link to the Brethren.

While placing the utmost importance on the devotional aspects of Christian life, Kargel did not deny the usefulness of formal preparation for ministry; for years he laboured in the area of Christian education. However, the schools, or rather, Bible courses, where he taught, were not known for being academically rigorous and intellectually challenging; they were of somewhat devotional nature. If one follows the hermeneutical accents from Radstock to Pashkov, and from Pashkov to Kargel, there will obviously be a good measure of succession. One shared point was their dislike of theology for its own sake: Kargel continued the tradition of Radstock and Pashkov who were no ivory tower theologians.

Other aims common to Radstock, Pashkov, and Kargel included knowing the Bible (canonical books) thoroughly, loving the Bible, and obeying it like little children. All three men considered the Bible inspired and exclusively authoritative. They did not want to know anything but the Bible. They were not concerned with archaeological and linguistic studies. They believed that it was impossible to truly understand the Bible without the power of the Holy Spirit. They allowed for deeper meaning behind the words. While they considered the Bible understandable in general, they admitted that some passages would always remain unclear. They incorporated the Bible into their language pattern. They viewed the Bible as a guide book for all life situations. When preaching or writing they moved rapidly from one passage to another. In their opinion church did not play a major role in the interpretation of the Bible; interpretation was left to individual believers. It was diligent study, sincere prayer, and living faith that was needed for correct understanding of Scripture.

Finally, I would like to say that I realise that my look at the possible roots of Kargel's and consequently Russian Evangelical hermeneutics does not explain everything. But it does explain some things. Or at least I hope so.

6.2 Kargel's hermeneutical guidelines

Briefly Kargel's hermeneutical guidelines can be summarised in the following way:

1. According to Kargel one must come to the text of the Scripture having certain presuppositions: biblical faith in God, recognition of the Bible's uniquely divine origin, prayer, obedience, acceptance of the Bible as truthful and authoritative, and an expectation for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit to help in the process of interpretation. In most cases Kargel is satisfied with the natural reading of the Bible, which holds the reader responsible to follow through with what such reading requires of him/her. The main objective of his exposition is to see both himself and his readers to become doers of the Word rather than hearers only.
2. The historical and literal meaning of the Bible is not the limit of its meaning. There exists the possibility of a deeper meaning, especially in prophetic literature.
3. Kargel holds to the fundamental rule of classical biblical hermeneutics that Scripture serves as the best commentary on itself (analogy of faith).

4. Kargel expects the Bible to speak to modern readers' concerns. God's Word transcends time and geographical location to the point that it becomes relevant for all readers in any era. Kargel concentrates on the universal commands that apply directly to all people in all cultures, or draws from biblical narratives implications and principles that he expects to be followed.
5. Kargel believes the entire Bible points to Jesus Christ. He often interprets the Old Testament (including the smallest details) typologically. He also often interprets the Old Testament illustratively.
6. Kargel makes some use of various translations, but he rarely resorts to citing the original languages, and then only if absolutely essential for an accurate grasp of the text.
7. In his interpretation Kargel hardly ever uses any of the extra-biblical materials, such as ancient non-biblical documents or modern scientific data.

6.3 The Contribution of this Study

This study was an attempt to analyse the hermeneutics of Kargel in the context of Russian evangelical history as well as in the context of several theological influences responsible for forming the Russian evangelical movement.

The author worked with the Russian version of Kargel's texts, supplying English translations to permit the English speaking reader to judge for himself/herself whether the conclusions concerning Kargel's hermeneutics stand the test.

The author used all relevant data available, including recently discovered details of Kargel's biography and his newly published writings.

In attempting to restore Kargel's hermeneutics the author took into consideration all kinds of formative influences in Kargel's life, including a number of significant personalities and the theological literature that was available to him.

As the pietistic nature of Kargel's theology had been emphasised by earlier research, this work followed his indebtedness to Brethren theology, the British holiness movement, and Mennonite Brethren theology and practice—all important influences that formed Kargel's theological profile.

By the way of a careful comparison of the texts of Kargel and Mackintosh, the author established Kargel's strong reliance upon Mackintosh in

interpreting the Old Testament types which resulted in Kargel's theological work "The reflection of glories to come".

6.4 The Prospect for Further Study

It seems that hermeneutical questions concerning Russian evangelical theology will continue to be raised. The ongoing search for self identity in the ranks of Russian evangelicals, coupled with the desire to understand one's theological roots and to verify present day approaches to scriptural interpretation will compel researchers to turn to the past again and again.

To what extent is Russian evangelicalism Russian? Did Kargel's German heritage and many influences from the west result in his evangelicalism being a syncretism of external influences expressed in a Russian socio-historical context?

This dissertation has only scratched the surface of Kargel's hermeneutical approach. The suggested answers do not presume to be final and irrevocable. Further discussion of Kargel's hermeneutics would allow reaching a closer approximation to the correct answers.

Besides it would be interesting to find out how do Kargel's major hermeneutical concepts compare and contrast with those of Russian orthodoxy. Certain areas, such as the sole authority of Scripture, clearly clash with orthodoxy, but do others, such as the pietistic direction and the prevalence of typology, tend to cohere with the orthodox approach?

Besides Kargel's works, the writings of other Russian evangelical theologians such as Pavlov, Shipkov, Prokhanov, Fetler, Datsko, Odintsov, Vasiliy, and Pavel Pavlov must become the subjects of detailed and serious study, examination, and comparison as well.

Very little attention has been given so far to the development of evangelical faith in Russia prior to the mid-nineteenth century. For example, Grossner's preaching and his calls to conversion in St. Petersburg deserve further studies.

Another interesting topic of research would be the explosion of Russian evangelical poetry during the times of revival, also characteristic of pietistic movements in general.

Then, it could be interesting to trace the connections of Russian evangelical groups with the Evangelical Alliance and the outcome of this relationship.

Finally, Kargel's eschatology deserves special analysis.

Postscript: The author hopes that someday the FSB archives related to Russian evangelical history will be opened to church historians; this would provide almost unlimited opportunity for further studies. Perhaps Kargel's personal files were not destroyed, but are preserved intact somewhere.