

Church Without Walls: Post-Soviet Baptists After the Ukrainian Revolution, 2013-14

Abstract

Recent events in Ukraine have forced post-Soviet evangelicals to address a question they had long avoided: ‘in what way is the gospel not only the source of personal salvation, but also the source of social transformation?’ This lecture advances the provocative argument that instead of calling the people to repent and make peace, the church itself should repent for betraying the people, and for failing for so many years to speak truthfully to those in power and to stand on the side of the oppressed. The lecture concludes on a hopeful note by showing that despite their limited numbers, Baptists can be in the vanguard of a new movement (a ‘church without walls’) for the reformation of the church and the renewal of society, which moves towards an open future with hope for greater freedom. While drawing on the author’s experience of living and working in Ukraine, this lecture also addresses vital issues that affect the global Baptist community, such as the missional imperatives of social justice and solidarity and the limits of political authority.

Commendation

“This outstanding lecture by the young British Baptist theologian, Dr Joshua Searle, offers something extremely valuable to the global Christianity by showing how the light of the Gospel shines not only within the church, but outside its walls in the wider society. Searle issues a prophetic challenge to the church to recover its calling to serve the Kingdom of God through dynamic engagement in the public sphere. I pray that this lecture will be an encouragement and a challenge to Baptists and the wider Christian community – in Ukraine, Britain and the global church – to imagine what a ‘church without walls’ might look like and to understand God’s plan for the redemption of the nations and the reconciliation of all things.”

– Dr Mykhailo Cherenkov, Vice President of Mission Eurasia and Professor in Philosophy at Ukrainian Catholic University

Author

Joshua T. Searle is Tutor in Theology and Public Thought at Spurgeon’s College, London. A Northumbrian by birth and temperament, he is a graduate of Oxford, Dublin and Prague. He is the author of books and articles on millennial studies and the social theology of evangelical Christians. He serves as Chair of Mission Eurasia UK (a partner of BMS World Mission) and is a Visiting Professor of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv.