

Nichols, Gregory L., *A Study of Ivan. V. Kargel (1849-1937): The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), xiv +381 pp. 44.00 USD

**Book review by guest writer Lawrence Klippenstein**

Till now Johann G. (Ivan Veniaminovich) Kargel frequently shows up in the annals of Russian Christianity, more particularly Protestantism, but with a somewhat sketchy personal and career profile. Nichols has changed that situation dramatically. There now exists a great deal more clarity about Kargel's total ministry as well as his personality and character. It is now much easier to assess his spiritual and church-related importance also.

Born in the Russian Caucasus region (birthplace?) in 1849, likely from a German father, and an Armenian mother, originally from Bulgaria (names unknown?), Kargel converted to the Christian faith as a young man of 20. After baptism he joined the eleven-member largely German (?) two-year old Baptist church in Tiflis, Georgia. He and Anna Semenova whom he married in Tultscha, Romania in 1880, had four daughters. One of them died early and the others, as they grew to adulthood, actively involved themselves in their father's work. None of them were married.

Kargel's call to ministry emerged early, owing much to contacts with Johann Wieler, a Mennonite Brethren teacher and minister from the Molotschna colony in south Russia, whom he stayed with while visiting Odessa in 1872-73, and another slightly more senior Baptist minister, Karl Ondra, whom he met in the same Odessa setting during this time. Eager to begin his life's work, Kargel, not yet ordained, took over a short pastorate in the Russian Polish village of Sorotschin, earlier pastored by Ondra, and also became a student for a year of the Hamburg Mission School, established by the German Baptists in 1849. Also in 1873, Ondra, Kargel and Wieler joined a number of other church leaders at a Mennonite Brethren missions conference held in the village of Klippenfeld, Molotschna.

After these biographical comments, Nichols provides a portrait of Kargel's ongoing work, pastoral and other ministries. The chronology of Appendix II very helpfully outlines 150 years of related activity from birth to Kargel's death in 1937, and present-day influences of his legacy among evangelicals today.

Nichols then designates five periods following the years of beginnings and laying of ministry foundations from 1849-1874. These include, further, the first period of 1875-1880 in St. Petersburg (not sure why the name is consistently, with one observed exception, cited as Saint Petersburg). Most of Kargel's work at this point focused on ministry to people of German extraction (Baptist connections). This time also provided ample opportunities for improving his use of the Russian language and getting to know the larger spectrum of Russian churches.

Most importantly, for what was to come, it brought him and his wife into much closer contact with another emerging evangelical leader, Vasily Alexandrovich Pashkov, and his wife, Alexandra Ivanovna Pashkova (surname needs to end with "a", not so used in the text, p. 72). Both would become strong influences in reshaping (widening, Anna would call it) some of the Kargels' theological thinking toward greater inclusivity of other than their earlier more strict Baptist interpretations regarding church structures and practices.

Then came the second period of work, now centred in Bulgaria (1880-1884), during which the extensive correspondence of Anna with Alexandra played a key role in the redirection noted above. Here Nichols draws heavily on the Pashkov personal papers which have recently found their way to numerous North American and other libraries.

A second period of work in St. Petersburg came in 1884-1887, at the end of which Pashkov was exiled from Russia, and the way cleared, as it turned out, for Kargel to greatly increase his scope of leadership among the evangelicals of the Russia capital. Eleven years of wider ministry in Russia, much of it in company with a German itinerant preacher, Dr. Friedrich Baedeker, visiting prisons, then precede a third period of work in St. Petersburg in which Kargel further extended his influence and organizational/institutional work especially in education, among St. Petersburg evangelicals.

Kargel is interpreted as having two objectives beyond his basic calling to preach Good News and fulfill local pastoral duties in Bulgaria, Russian territories like Finland, where he established its first Baptist church, and elsewhere. Firstly Kargel hoped to unify evangelical Protestant groups in Russian-held lands. His other objective was to amplify their traditional theological spectrum by giving a more privileged place to the teaching of sanctification or holiness (in Russian, *osvya(e?)shchenie*, translit. with a “c”, as the text does not).

The author does not attempt to analyze in depth the degree to which Kargel achieved these objectives. Evidence abounds to suggest that unifying disparate groups of Russian evangelicals was then, as it is still, a daunting (impossible?) task. Similarly, the teaching of sanctification likely generated non-unifying controversy (though not highlighted in this study), as it did among those from the Keswick Convention disciples in Britain and other adherents who were Kargel’s mentors/champions for this theological distinctive.

Space limits forbid a treatment of other significant features of what is really a most important and indeed even exciting study of someone who rose to the forefront of Russian evangelical leadership, far from forgotten among fellow believers in Russia even today. The book is attractively produced with features like helpful appendices and maps, photos of Kargel (perhaps Anna’s will show up one day), and a fine index with updated bibliography. Technical problems such as some text portions obviously omitted (e.g. p. 190, line 4 ff.), white space where not appropriate, proof reading problems (spelling errors), especially with German words, etc., do not distract unduly from reading through, but will be noticed by some.

Nichols’ disclaimer about writing a definitive Kargel volume is reflected in a very useful, brief section putting forth themes for further research (pp. 306-307). For this reviewer the suggestion of looking more closely at the Mennonite (Brethren) connection is apropos. It is possible that the extensive Wieler correspondence in the Pashkov papers needs more exploration, and there may be German-language sources pertinent here also.

Another reviewer’s judgment that from now on the author “deserves to be heard” on this topic is to the point. He deserves commendation indeed for making available an important new source for the study of Russian evangelical spirituality (perhaps beyond that), as the book’s subtitle aptly claims.

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