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Walter Sawatsky. *Going Global with God as Mennonites for the 21st Century* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2017).

I first encountered Walter Sawatsky's provocative, unconventional thinking in a history survey course that I took at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in the late 1980s. The course was less about historical details and much more about rethinking the ways that we typically view the church and world. I remember Sawatsky talking passionately about the importance of the global church, especially its Eastern and Southern expressions. He was critical of Mennonite fixations with 16th-century Anabaptist beginnings and argued for a study of Mennonite history that would take seriously the 500-year story. More generally, he wanted students to rethink the dominant and standard interpretations of Christian history. Over the years the learnings from that class stuck with me and continue to shape my teaching, research, and writing. I was pleased to encounter Sawatsky's passion again in this publication, which encapsulates his thinking and raises important questions for the church, especially the Mennonite community as it seeks to find its way in the 21st century.

Based on the 2014 Menno Simons lectures at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, the volume begins with a sermon, arguing for a reading of history that has a capacity "to absorb the whole story, warts and all." Eschewing hubris, Sawatsky directs readers to the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God that calls Christians always to seek reform and renewal, and to practice genuine love by welcoming strangers and minority persons.

Next, Sawatsky turns to the Russian Mennonite story, noting the way in which the standard accounts typically highlight the rise of the Russian Mennonite Commonwealth, or focus attention on those groups that became a part of the westward migrations to North America. The problem with these narratives, according to Sawatsky, is that they tend to overlook the majority of Mennonites of southern Russia and the Ukraine, who ended up living in central Asia, Siberia, and the Ural regions of Russia. In looking eastward, he finds a vibrant missionary-oriented church in a persistent state of vulnerability that has a simple commitment to doing what is required without fanfare. Sawatsky maintains that this is a story worth telling because it does not reflect a static or essentialist way of thinking about the history of

a people, but rather narrates a story that is dynamic, always evolving, and adapting to changing contexts.

In the remaining three chapters, the author further elaborates on this dynamic nature of history, and the importance of interpreting the Christian story well. He takes aim at sectarian thinking, especially the kind of history writing and theologizing that focuses solely on pre-Constantinian Christianity or 16th-century Anabaptism, or that assumes God is interested only in what the Mennonite tradition has sometimes identified as the “faithful remnant.” Attempting to retrieve the purity of some golden age will not do, and failing to tell the larger story of faithfulness during the Middle Ages is irresponsible and limits the way in which God works in the world. Mennonites need a public theology that takes into account society as a whole. Sawatsky insists that our horizons must include the two-thousand-year story of Christian history, and our mission must include the reconciliation of the entire divided Christian family.

A persistent thread running through the book is that Mennonites should not succumb to historical amnesia. They need to hone their skills at interpreting history responsibly, and to find ways of telling the Christian story from multiple perspectives. Leaving history behind and uniting around common core theological assumptions is problematic, because theological formulas do not pay sufficient attention to differences within and between faith communities. Sawatsky doubts that a “common theology” called “Anabaptist” or “Mennonite” can truly unite. Mennonites should invest in fraternal relationships, learn to narrate their histories humbly and honestly, and invest in gatherings that bring divergent peoples together. He insists that the church must demonstrate a capacity to agonize over important issues in spite of the reality that differences abound.

Having spent numerous years relating to Christians in the East and West in his capacity as mission worker, editor, teacher, and scholar, Sawatsky brings much breadth and depth to his writing. Although the text would have benefited from a stronger editorial hand, the impulses that emanate from this volume are prophetic and penetrating. Church leaders, mission workers, and educators will discover much wisdom and insight in its pages.

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