William A. Fetler in Exile, 1914–1957

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Abstract:
The Baptist preacher William A. Fetler (1883–1957) made important contributions to the evangelical movement in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, but most of his ministry was spent outside of that geographical area, following his exile in 1914. Besides surveying his many accomplishments in evangelism, literature production, and other ministries, this article focuses on Fetler's identity as an exile and the ways that status may have shaped his activities.

Keywords:
William A. Fetler; exile; Baptists; Stundists

Introduction

Just before Christmas 1938, a dilapidated bus pulled up at a border crossing between Denmark and Nazi Germany. Inside were twelve youngsters[1] ranging in age from four to twenty-four and their mother. They claimed to be an orchestra on their way to present a series of concerts in Switzerland. The border guards were intrigued by the numerous musical instruments among the luggage, but they were also suspicious. They took the youthful driver aside and questioned him at length. Were they really all one family? Why were they travelling? Why was their father not with them? Why did they present such a variety of travel documents for inspection?

At last, the group was permitted to continue their journey, but the true answers the driver (the oldest brother, Daniel) gave to the guards' many questions must certainly have strained their credulity. The

[1] There were thirteen children in the family, but just before this trip the second eldest, Timothy Fetler (1915–1981), went to the US to study.

young people on the bus were, in fact, a family who gave concerts — a sort of Baptist version of the Von Trapp family of *The Sound of Music*. They had been performing as a group since 1933, and, like other musical ensembles, they occasionally went on tour.[2]

However, there was another, long-range reason behind this particular border crossing (and for their itinerant lifestyle, as well). Their father, William A. Fetler (1883–1957),[3] a Baptist preacher and a Latvian by birth, had been exiled from the Russian Empire in 1914 for preaching the enemy 'German faith'. Ever since, he and his growing family had been on the move. The eldest son was born in St. Petersburg and had left Russia as an infant with his exiled parents. The next four children were born in the United States, then one in England, one in Germany, and the last six in Latvia. Between 1933 and 1938, the Fetler family had lived in Latvia, the Netherlands, and Sweden. At the time of the 1938 orchestra tour, the family had no fixed address and Fetler himself was in Riga seeing to matters connected with the large evangelical church (Salvation Temple; Russian: *Khram spaseniia*) he had founded there in 1927.

A Ministry in Exile

Primarily a revival preacher, Fetler had played an important role in the growth of the evangelical movement in the Russian Empire for just seven years, from 1907 to 1914. Following his banishment, until his death some forty years later, he initiated and sustained numerous ambitious projects aimed at evangelising the land he left behind. In other words, by far the greater part of his ministry was spent outside of Russia and the Soviet Union.

Because of this, Fetler is not well known today among Baptists and other evangelicals in the former Soviet Union, although there is

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[2] Joseph Fetler Malof, *Family Band* (2006), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=107191sKmFRQ&t=1640s> [accessed 7 May 2020]. This documentary is an informative 'home movie' about the Fetler family.

[3] This is Fetler's anglicised name, which will be used in this article; he was born Wilhelms Andreis Vettlers. When his family settled permanently in the United States during the 1940s and he became a citizen, he changed his name to Basil Maloff (Vasil' Malov).

growing interest in his career. He is a contradictory figure. Fetler was devoted to God, powerfully energetic, innovative in ministry, and a magnetic speaker. Yet even one of his admirers (and he had many loyal friends and supporters) described his approach as sometimes '*izvorotlivyi*' (dodgy, shifty).[4] Throughout his life, he was involved in conflicts with Baptist church structures in the United States, Europe, and the Soviet Union and finally even with the board of the mission he himself founded.[5] How is William Fetler to be understood?

A complete character analysis is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, I propose tracing one thread of Fetler's experience which may contribute toward greater in-depth study of this leader, namely his status as an exile. Not surprisingly, the events surrounding his arrest, sentencing, and re-sentencing in 1914 formed an important turning point in his life and had deep emotional and spiritual repercussions. Along with a brief summary of Fetler's accomplishments, I will suggest ways that exile and the idea of exile may have shaped his ministry and family life.

A Commitment to Preach

Since his early youth, Fetler sensed a call to preach the gospel, which led him in 1904 to enrol at the Pastors' College, founded in London by C. H. Spurgeon (1834–1892).[6] The call became a passion, strengthened by his experience of the Welsh Revival of 1904–1905. Years later, an eyewitness recalled being present at a meeting in Wales when 'a young student from Russia', with tears in his eyes, suddenly cried out, 'Oh, pray for me to be baptised with power! Pray that I would be God's chosen instrument to labour in the darkness of Russia!' Although unidentified

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[4] As it was explained to me, *izvorotlivyi* refers to 'a person who can come out of the water completely dry'. The word was applied to Fetler in a biographical sketch of Ivan Iakovlevich Urlaub (1854–1936), who was dramatically converted through Fetler's ministry and supported him for many years (Stepan Sevast'ianov, *Moi vospominaniia: Pleiada sluzhitelei Doma Evangeliia, 1924-1937* [My recollections: The constellation of ministers at Dom Evangeliia, 1924-1937] (Asheville, NC: The Russian Bible Society, 2018), p. 165).

[5] Albert W. Wardin, Jr, 'William Fetler: The Thundering Evangelist', *American Baptist Quarterly,* 25*,* no. 3 (Fall 2006): 235–246 (pp. 239, 241–242).

[6] John Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai: Istoriia dukhovnogo probuzhdeniia v Rossii i Latvii,* trans. by Andrei Radchenko (Asheville, NC: Russian Bible Society and Revival Literature, 2016), pp. 24–38.

by the man who recorded the incident, there is little doubt that the student was Fetler.[7] He did, indeed, long to preach in Russia, and, saw that as the main purpose of his life.

In 1907, Fetler returned to St. Petersburg under the sponsorship of the Baptist Pioneer Mission. The timing was perfect. Toleration for 'sectarians' had been declared in 1905, and although the new laws were unevenly administered, and new restrictions were imposed in 1910, the evangelical movement was growing.[8] Hard statistics concerning his contribution do not exist, but Fetler's own evangelistic ministries were surely responsible for a significant portion of that growth, at least in St. Petersburg, where he was most active.

In 1912, he reported holding special meetings for university students and preaching in as many as twelve 'stations' around St. Petersburg.[9] In that same year, he became pastor of the flagship Baptist church in the capital, Dom Evangeliia (House of the Gospel), which seated 2000 and was reportedly packed full at every meeting. In addition, he was involved in any number of outreach ministries conducted from Dom Evangeliia and oversaw the publication of journals and other Christian literature.[10] Fetler also founded a Baptist church in Moscow (1909) and one in Riga (1910).[11]

Arrest and Exile

In spite of the official (if fragile) policy of religious toleration, however, Fetler was regarded as a threat by the Russian Orthodox Church and

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[7] J. Fetler, *Bozhiĭ glashatai*, p. 34. The incident was recorded by Sidney Evans, brother-in-law of the Welsh revival preacher Evan Roberts; however, J. Fetler does not reference the source.
[8] Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 27.
[9] Wilhelm Fetler, 'Russia and the Gospel', *The Missionary Review of the World* (October 1912): 741–743.
[10] For greater detail on this period of Fetler's life, see Mary Raber, *Ministries of Compassion among Russian Evangelicals, 1905-1929* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), pp. 113–143.
[11] J. Fetler, *Bozhiĭ glashatai*, pp. 62–67; Oswald A. Blumit and Oswald J. Smith, *Sentenced to Siberia* (Washington, DC: The Russian Bible Society, 1947), pp. 61–63; James Alexander Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry* (Asheville, NC: The Russian Bible Society, 1968), pp. 52–60.

consequently by certain representatives of the government.[12] He was under police surveillance more than once. With the beginning of the First World War, Fetler (as, indeed, all evangelicals) came under more suspicion than usual for his many foreign contacts and supposed propagation of the 'German faith'.[13]

Finally, in November 1914, in the middle of his usual Saturday evening prayer meeting, Fetler was arrested and jailed, sentenced to immediate banishment to Siberia. In his own words, 'Exile to Siberia was almost the same thing as a death sentence.'[14] He had only ten minutes to prepare before he was marched away and locked in a cell with several other prisoners.

However, even before he had time to lie down on a cot, he was taken to an official's office and told that if he was willing to pay for his own transport, he could have three days to prepare — an accommodation sometimes extended to prisoners who posed no threat of violence. This was certainly an answer to prayer and cause for rejoicing, even though the sentence still loomed. During the ensuing three days, however, through the intervention of influential friends,[15] the sentence was commuted to permanent exile abroad and the preparation time was extended. After ten days, which included ten evening evangelistic services and many tearful farewells, Fetler, his wife Barbara (nee Kovalevska, 1890–1969), and their infant son Daniel (1914–1995, the future road manager of the family band) departed for Sweden.

This basic narrative of events[16] would be repeated numerous times for the rest of Fetler's life. One of his main biographers and faithful supporters, Dr Oswald J. Smith (1889–1986), composed a written version, most likely based on Fetler's own words heard in many

[12] John Fetler hints that Grigoriĭ Rasputin, the favourite of Empress Alexandra, could have been behind efforts to repress his father (*Bozhiĭ glashatai*, pp. 81–83).
[13] Ibid., pp. 64–67, 81–84.
[14] Ibid., p. 86.
[15] Albert W. Wardin, Jr adds that Fetler also appealed on his own behalf to be sent abroad instead, citing concern for the health of his family ('William Fetler', p. 239).
[16] Ibid., pp. 86–90. John Fetler apparently 'quotes' his father, although he may also have drawn on Oswald J. Smith's version.

verbal testimonies,[17] which was later circulated in other biographies and promotional material.[18] Beyond the actual recital of the story, however, how did Fetler interpret his exile over time?

Exile as Providence

Although his initial reaction to being suddenly ejected from his home could only have been shock, Fetler soon came to regard the experience as evidence of God's providence. The family were welcomed by Swedish evangelicals. Fetler continued to preach and draw large crowds, but he still felt that his true calling was to evangelise Russia.[19]

A way to continue that ministry was presented to him when he learned of the situation of thousands of Russian prisoners of war in Germany. In February 1915, Fetler organised the Gospel Committee for Work Among War Prisoners in Europe, which became one of the key sources of Christian literature for distribution among the prisoners. Barbara Fetler translated numerous tracts into Russian.[20]

The Fetlers' contribution was enormous, but not single-handed. The evangelisation of Russian prisoners during the First World War was a huge cooperative effort, involving hundreds of individuals, churches, and organisations both inside and outside of Germany. As a result, the end of the war gradually released thousands of newly converted 'evangelists' into Soviet Russia.[21]

For Fetler personally, however, the literature ministry to POWs was clear evidence that God had providentially turned his exile into triumph: 'A preacher of the Gospel had to be hated by the priests, attacked, imprisoned, sentenced to Siberia. That sentence is quickly commuted to banishment abroad. Thereby instead of lessening the

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[17] Rev. Oswald J. Smith, 'A Prophet in Exile', in *Sentenced to Siberia*, by Blumit and Smith, pp. 31–36.
[18] See, for example, a pamphlet entitled *Exiled from Russia* (Washington, DC: The Russian Bible Society, 1951), pp. 10–11; Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry*, pp. 63–67.
[19] Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry,* pp. 67–68.
[20] Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry,* pp. 71–77; J. Fetler, *Bozhiĭ glashatai,* pp. 93–95.
[21] Hans Brandenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 158–161.

activities of the evangelist, they were greatly enhanced.'[22] In other words, although his enemies threw him out of Russia, God sent thousands of evangelists in his place. There was purpose in his exile.

Exile as Independence

To promote the ministry to war prisoners, the Fetlers went to the United States in April 1915. Always a powerful speaker, the exciting story of his deliverance and his new status as an exile probably added authority and authenticity to Fetler's message. He quickly raised $120,000 for the outreach to POWs.[23]

He was invited to head the Russian Department of the Northern Baptist Home Mission Society and later to lead the Society's Russian Bible Institute in New York City. However, his growing dissatisfaction with 'modernist' theology within official Baptist structures and educational institutions led him to resign from those posts. In 1917 he set up the Russian Missionary Society, with a training school in Philadelphia. Fifty of the fifty-three students at the New York school followed him there.[24]

Albert W. Wardin, Jr has pointed out that Fetler was long accustomed to making his own way. During his ministry years in St. Petersburg, although he participated in Baptist national congresses and other events, his geographical distance from the Baptist leadership in the south, his language ability, and foreign travels allowed Fetler to build up his own contacts and following. This made him somewhat independent of formal denominational structures. Now his disavowal of the Home Mission Society elicited sharp criticism, but it also set him free to manage his own affairs with full control of his own training

[22] Pastor Basil Malof, 'The Greatest Missionary Challenge of the Christian Era for Work among the White People', in *Sentenced to Siberia,* by Blumit and Smith, pp. 140–141.
[23] J. Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai,* pp. 92–96.
[24] William Fetler, 'Kak ia otkryl eres' modernizma sredi amerikanskikh baptistov' [How I discovered the heresy of modernism among American Baptists], *Drug Rossii* [Friend of Russia] (August–November 1924), <http://rusbaptist.stunda.org/dop/fetler/html> [accessed 20 October 2020].

school and mission society.[25] He quickly raised funds for these new undertakings.[26]

It is also possible that his self-understanding as an exile added a touch of heroism. It served to distinguish him from worldly Americans and identify him more closely with ordinary believers in Russia who knew nothing of sophisticated theologies, a stance that would also help gain the support of American fundamentalists.[27] In his explanation for his abandonment of North American Baptist mission structures, Fetler declared that of all the evangelicals in Russia, 'As far as I know, among them there is not a single modernist: all of them are simple, devoted believers in the Lord and His Word.'[28]

Exile as an Ideal

It is not difficult to see what Fetler's critics were driving at when they accused him of being divisive, arrogant, controlling, and excessively independent.[29] However, there is also evidence of considerable soul searching on Fetler's part during the years 1915–1920, spent in the United States. He was well aware of the chaos that gripped Soviet Russia during those years. In addition, at this time Fetler reflected on the more distant historical experience of those who had suffered for their faith in Russia.

In 1922 he published a book of poems in English entitled *The Stundist in Siberian Exile*. The poems themselves, written between 1918 and 1921, have little literary merit. In his generous foreword, F. B. Meyer (1847–1929) warns the reader that '[t]hey do not pretend to smooth eloquence of phrase […]'. However, Meyer also points out that '[…] Pastor Fetler has entered deeply into sympathy with these persecuted ones'.[30]

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[25] Albert W. Wardin, Jr, *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), p. 354.
[26] Wardin, 'William Fetler', p. 240.
[27] Ibid., p. 239.
[28] W. Fetler, 'Kak ia otkryl eres' modernizma sredi amerikanskikh baptistov'.
[29] Wardin, 'William Fetler', pp. 239, 241–242.
[30] F. B. Meyer, 'Foreword', in William Fetler, *The Stundist in Siberian Exile and Other Poems* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1922), no page.

'The Stundist in Siberian Exile' (1921) is the longest poem in the collection. It relates the story of a devout peasant, Ivan Nikitich, who searched for God in all the ways of traditional Orthodoxy, but finally grasped the truth of salvation when he met a Bible *colporteur* who introduced him to Scripture. Ivan Nikitich thus became a 'Stundist', a pejorative Russian term derived from the German *Stunde,* meaning 'hour'. A Stundist did not attend Orthodox worship, but instead gathered to pray and read the Bible with like-minded people at a *Gebetstunde* (prayer hour) or *Bibelstunde* (Bible hour), following the example of Pietist German colonists. This was considered subversive activity by the authorities, and many Stundists — some of whom were personally known to Fetler — were exiled in chains to the far corners of the Russian Empire, especially during the 1890s. This is the fate of the Stundist in the poem. Ivan Nikitich goes bravely to serve his sentence and continues to minister faithfully to his fellow prisoners.

In 1920, the pastor of Dom Evangeliia, where Fetler had once ministered, was arrested and sentenced to three years in an internment camp at the former Solovetskiĭ monastery on an island in the White Sea. Is it a coincidence that the pastor had the same name as Fetler's 'Stundist'? Ivan Nikitich Shilov (1887–1942) was a navy medic who experienced a dramatic conversion and was baptised by Fetler in 1912. He soon became an effective preacher, and in 1919 took on the post of senior pastor of Dom Evangeliia when the previous pastor left Petrograd[31] with refugees in search of food. In years to come, Shilov would endure three more periods of internal exile until his death in 1942, while serving a sentence in a lumber camp.[32]

Even if Shilov's experience had no connection with it, the 'Stundist' poem suggests that during this time Fetler was thinking about those who actually endured the Siberian exile he had been spared. Probably, it would be excessive to claim that Fetler was experiencing 'survivor guilt', but it is certainly possible that a desire to live up to the legacy of the Stundists and a sense of responsibility toward those suffering in Soviet Russia led Fetler to compare their 'ideal' exile with

[31] The Germanic name 'St. Petersburg' was changed to the Slavic equivalent 'Petrograd' during the First World War.
[32] Sevast'ianov, *Moi vospominaniia*, pp. 51–76.

his. Perhaps part of his great energy and determination came from a desire to make his own exile worthy of theirs.

Family Life in Exile

In 1920, Fetler and his family returned to Europe with a group of twenty-three missionaries trained in Philadelphia. After brief stays in Berlin and Warsaw, the Russian Missionary Society headquarters finally settled in Riga in 1923 where a training school, a publishing house, and a mega-church (Salvation Temple, 1927) were established. Throughout the 1920s, Society missionaries engaged in church planting, largely in the newly independent countries bordering Soviet Russia. Missionaries crossed into that country as well, and support was carried in to the pastors there. Literature work and ministries to Russian-speaking refugees throughout Europe were also part of the mission's calling.[33] Money had to be raised to sustain all these far-flung projects and Fetler was continually on the road.

The Great Depression hindered those efforts and increased repressions against believers in the Soviet Union led to the arrest of the missionary pastors Fetler supported. Meanwhile, political pressures in Central and Eastern Europe curbed missionary activity there as well, and led Fetler to establish new administrative centres in the Netherlands in 1934 and in Scandinavia later on. The family moved to Amsterdam and later to Stockholm.[34] However, conflicts with the board of the Russian Missionary Society continued, and Fetler resigned in 1936.[35]

Having freed himself from organisational ties, Fetler's status as an independent missionary also made it more difficult to meet his many commitments. Now he had sole responsibility for promoting his projects and supporting his family. Did his insistence on the complete control of his ministry amount to a kind of self-exile?

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[33] J. Fetler, *Bozhiĭ glashatai,* pp. 106–107; Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry,* pp. 91–97; Wardin, 'William Fetler', pp. 240–241.
[34] J. Fetler, *Bozhiĭ glashatai,* pp. 147–148.
[35] Wardin, 'William Fetler', p. 242.

Fetler's family, of course, shared his way of life. Before he married Barbara, Fetler had made it clear to her that ministry would always come first with him.[36] For forty-three years, she was a help and support to her husband, especially in the matter of raising the couple's thirteen children. She also was an accomplished literary translator. Fetler sometimes spent months at a time apart from the family and, although he was doubtless greatly respected, Barbara is the parent who was evidently remembered most fondly. She is the one who provided continuity during their wandering years.[37]

During the time that the family lived in Riga, the children learned to play various musical instruments, and as they grew up joined the orchestra at Salvation Temple. Several of them studied at the musical conservatory.[38] In 1932, Fetler was absent from his family for about a year, while he returned to the United States to raise money for printing Bibles to be sent to Russia. On his return in 1933, the children prepared a musical performance to welcome him home. He was extremely pleased by this attention and began to feature the family orchestra as part of worship at Salvation Temple. Invitations to other churches and venues followed, programmes were rehearsed and improved, and gradually the 'Rainbow Orchestra' took shape.[39]

The driving force behind the band was Fetler's eldest son, Daniel, who was not only the musical director but also the group's booking agent, publicity manager, bus driver, and even surrogate father. Photographs show the ten brothers and three sisters engagingly posed according to height. Their concerts were a mixture of orchestral and choral numbers in several languages. For extra charm, the youngest members of the family were each in turn featured as conductor until they grew out of the role. Fetler himself appears occasionally in the photos, but the actual business of running the band fell to Daniel.

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[36] Smith, 'A Prophet in Exile' in Blumit and Smith, *Sentenced to Siberia*, p. 36.
[37] See J. Fetler Malof, *Family Band,* 'Dispersion', 50:47–56:09; cf. the sympathetic portrayal of Anna Sokoloff in Andrew Fetler, *The Travelers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965).
[38] J. Fetler Malof, *Family Band,* 11:20–11:26; J. Fetler, *Bozhiĭ glasbatai,* pp. 126–127.
[39] J. Fetler Malof, *Family Band,* 11:26–12:27.

As an adult, the youngest son, Joseph Fetler Malof (1934–2015), termed the concerts 'amateurish',[40] but the group was a novelty and enthusiastically received. They accompanied their father's preaching tours, but the family band essentially made the children self-supporting, although the concerts were free and only an offering was taken. To save money on hotels, Daniel would invite members of the audience to house one or more of the children overnight.

At the time of their last European tour (October 1938 to June 1939), described at the beginning of this article, Fetler was apart from his family. He rejoined them in Copenhagen in the summer of 1939 and they sailed for New York. Eventually, the family put down roots in Evanston, Illinois. The children were able to continue their schooling, but the Rainbow Orchestra continued to perform until 1944, sometimes three to five concerts a week, to support themselves.[41] Their unsettled lifestyle apparently did them no harm. All of the Fetler children went on to successful careers as music professors and composers, a sculptor, a colonel in the US Air Force, English professors and writers, a Russian teacher, and a librarian.

What is more, they made their move to the United States just in time. When William moved the mission headquarters from Riga to Amsterdam in 1934, he entrusted the Russian congregation at Salvation Temple to his younger brother Robert (1892–1941). The latter had also studied at the Pastors' College in London from 1911 to 1915. During the First World War he was exiled to the region of Yakutia, in eastern Siberia, but the revolution came in time to nullify the charges against him. Robert then returned to Petrograd, married, and went east again, ministering briefly in Omsk, Vladivostok, and Harbin.[42] Robert and his family returned to Riga in 1924 after William's family had resettled there.

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[40] Ibid., 'Dispersion', 50:47–56:09.

[41] J. Fetler Malof, *Family Band,* 'The Grand Tour', 20:08–24:49; 'Evanston', 45:04–50:46; 'Dispersion', 50:47–56:09.

[42] Albert J. Wardin, Jr ('William Fetler', pp. 242–243) and John Fetler (*Bozhiĭ glashatai*, p. 141) state that Robert served as a missionary with the China Inland Mission. The account offered by Stepan Sevast'ianov based on an interview with Robert's widow, Tat'iana Ivanovna, in Riga in 1973 (*Moi vospominaniia,* pp. 5–13), does not mention the China Inland Mission, but maintains that the Robert Fetlers ministered in the Soviet Far East somewhat by chance while they were waiting to be granted a visa to the United States.

On 1 September 1939, the Second World War began when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. The Soviets occupied Latvia in the summer of 1940, and a year later, in a mass deportation on 13 and 14 June 1941, Robert Fetler, his wife, and children were separated from each other and loaded onto freight cars bound for Siberia. Robert died in October 1941. His two sons lived a few months longer. Only his wife and two daughters survived to return to Riga.[43] Like Ivan Nikitich Shilov, his own brother had now suffered the exile that William Fetler once averted. As James Stewart states simply, 'He was a heart-broken man.'[44]

Exile as Identity and Credential

During the 1940s, when he became a US citizen, William Fetler officially changed his name to Basil Malof. John Fetler suggests that his father's name change signalled 'a new beginning in the New World'.[45] However, it is worth noting that the name was actually new only to Barbara and the three youngest children who also adopted it. To Fetler himself, it was an old name, an anglicised rendering of Vasil' Malov, a pseudonym he had used previously for some literary efforts. 'Malov' means 'small' or 'least' in Russian. As Fetler himself explained, the new/old surname echoed John the Baptist: 'He [Christ] must become greater and I must become less' [Russian: *'u*mal*iatsia'*] (John 3:30).[46]

However, besides the desire to live out John the Baptist's words, Albert W. Wardin, Jr observes that the name Basil Malof also served to link Fetler more closely to Russia than the name he was born with.[47] Such a link doubtless would have been of deep personal significance to Fetler, remembering his brother's death and knowing the sufferings of those professing religious faith in the Soviet Union. At the same time, the name 'Malof' was also part of Fetler's renewed emphasis on his experience of exile.

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[43] Sevast'ianov, 'Robert Andreevich Fetler', in *Moi vospominaniia,* pp. 11–13; J. Fetler Malof, *Family Band,* 'Evanston', 45:04–50:46.
[44] Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry,* p. 116.
[45] J. Fetler, *Bozhiĭ glashatai,* p. 155.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Wardin, 'William Fetler', p. 243.

Throughout the 1940s, Fetler continued to devote himself to promoting projects concerned with evangelising Russia — still the deepest calling of his life. In particular, he organised the Russian Bible Society, consciously drawing parallels with the historic Russian Bible Society established in St. Petersburg in 1813.[48] The urgency he felt to print Bibles, prepare study aids, and find ways to get the precious literature across hostile borders was genuine. He needed to inspire donors with that same sense of urgency in order to support his mission. Nothing would accomplish that purpose better than a personal testimony, and so during this time Oswald Smith's written version of Fetler's exile story was first circulated in print.[49] The image of Basil Malof, a dedicated pastor hounded by the authorities, arrested and banished, thus became his main identity, a kind of credential, emphasising Fetler's authenticity as a spokesman for believers living in peril in the Soviet Union. Photographs show him wearing a Russian-style belted and embroidered shirt.

It was not a cynical pose, yet this version of 'Fetler/Malof-as-exile' could easily stray into the realm of the sensational. The front cover of a pamphlet dated 1951, boldly titled *Exiled from Russia,* shows a figure in chains, while on the back cover a cartoon of Uncle Sam holds out a Bible to a group of Russians straining forward to grasp the gift. Somehow the contents connect Fetler's brief stay in jail thirty years before and the need for Christian literature in the Soviet Union.[50] Yet a more restrained approach would not draw the amount of attention needed to support Fetler's mission.

Fetler's sixth son, Andrew (1925–2017), addressed misleading self-promotion in a novel entitled *The Travelers.*[51] Its plot is certainly fiction, but many details are drawn from the Fetlers' life.[52] The novel

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[48] Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry,* pp. 117–118.

[49] Blumit and Smith, *Sentenced to Siberia,* was first copyrighted in 1940.

[50] Rev. A. L. Leeder, Dr. Oswald J. Smith, Rev. Oswald A. Blumit, *Exiled from Russia* (Washington, DC: The Russian Bible Society, 1951).

[51]Andrew Fetler, *The Travelers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965). It is interesting that the novel is dedicated to the memory of Pope John XXIII.

[52] Evidently, *The Travelers* cut close enough to the bone that Daniel Fetler sued for libel in 1966 because of the novel's unflattering portrayal of the oldest brother, Maxim Solovyov, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/364/650/316939> [accessed 15 May 2020].

concerns a family band consisting of thirteen children and their parents roaming Central Europe during the 1930s. This dark version of the Rainbow Orchestra depicts a hungry, ill-clad gaggle of restless, resentful children and teenagers struggling to assert themselves against their domineering father, Ivan Solovyov, who is obsessed with his great calling to evangelise Russia. Costumed in a wrinkled tunic decorated with strips of carpeting and tied with the cord of an old dressing gown, Solovyov no longer preaches sermons, but endlessly rehearses the dramatic story of his 'arrest and exile'. The truth, however, is that he spent a single night in jail for failing to pay the rent on a hired hall and then was sent out of Russia for his suspicious connections with a British evangelical mission. Solovyov's martyrdom is invented.[53]

Conclusion

William Fetler is not the fictional Ivan Solovyov, although the latter certainly serves as a cautionary example of where grandiose notions of one's mission might lead. Fetler's arrest and exile were genuine, affected him deeply, and formed one of the important themes of this influential preacher's life. His status as an exile had significant consequences for his family as well.

Exile came upon Fetler suddenly, yet he understood his life to be under God's sovereign direction and accepted exile as part of that. Exile gave him the freedom to minister in ways that would not have been possible if he had stayed in Russia. The knowledge that others were suffering other, harsher kinds of exile kept him focused on his ministry. If his exile set him apart and contributed to his tendency to be divisive and controlling, it also gave him an identity and integrity. If he exaggerated some of his experiences, it was always to serve the greater calling of evangelising Russia.

[53] A. Fetler, *The Travelers,* pp. 17, 31, 45, 78–84.