

WORLDVIEW OF RADICAL REFORMATION AS A PATHWAY TOWARDS INTEGRATION OF SLAVIC BAPTISTS IN AUSTRALIA*

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Аннотация: Славянские баптисты, иммигрировавшие и продолжающие иммигрировать в Австралию, происходят от радикальной Реформации, как и другие баптисты во всем мире. Они находятся в определенном этническо-религиозном противостоянии. В этническом смысле славянские баптисты, подобно прочим славянам, в Австралии являются маргинальной группой иммигрантов, но в то же самое время они связаны с австралийскими баптистами. Цель этой работы – показать, что реформационно-протестантское* религиозное мировоззрение, вера и взгляды славянских баптистов Австралии способствуют их отождествлению с обществом благодаря связи с австралийскими баптистами и другими евангельскими христианами, и помогают им в процессе их интеграции в общество страны.

Один из важных факторов, определяющих мировоззрение иммигрантов, – их представление о Боге. Славянские баптисты видят в Нем не национально-территориального Бога, но благодатного Спасителя, Бога,

Abstract: Slavic Baptists, who immigrated and are still immigrating to Australia, are descendants of the Radical Reformers, along with other Baptists around the world. They find themselves in a kind of ethnic-religious counter-directed relationship. Slavic Baptists in Australia are, ethnically speaking, a marginal group of immigrants alongside other Slavic people, but at the same time they are affiliated with the Australian Baptists. This paper aims to show that the radical-reformed religious worldview, faith and beliefs of the Australian Slavic Baptists facilitate their identification with mainstream Australian society through Australian Baptists and other Evangelical Christians, and helps them in their process of integration.

One important criteria in the formation of the immigrants' worldview is their understanding of God. Slavic Baptists see Him not as a national-territorial God, but as a gracious

* Мировоззрение радикальной Реформации как путь интеграции славянских баптистов в Австралии

который контролирует все во всех странах. Бог вездесущ и ощущается через Его личную заботу и обеспечение. Он – Бог надежды, который всегда ободряет их дух во времена тревоги и отчаяния. Все это соответствует их опыту как перемещенных лиц, беженцев и иммигрантов. Соответственно их опыту, этот Бог принял их в Австралии через других его детей – австралийских баптистов, которых они считают братьями и сестрами во Христе. Сотрудничество с местными баптистами помогло им основать славянские баптистские церкви в Аделаиде, Бризбане, Мельбурне, Перте и Сиднее. Это способствовало основанию и развитию сети сотрудничества с другими евангельскими верующими. Славянские баптисты любят Австралию и австралийцев в силу позитивного опыта отношений с австралийскими баптистами. Поэтому любая поместная баптистская церковь – их церковь в определенном смысле, и евангельские австралийцы относятся к категории наши люди, что очень важно для иммигрантов.

Как показало исследование, славянских баптистов характеризует в большей мере религия (вера), а не этнос. Само инклюзивное понятие “славянская”, а не “русская” или “украинская” (церковь) определенно указывает на это. Также определение себя как баптистов дает этим людям чувство принадлежности к австралийским баптистам и другим евангельским христианам. Эта причастность к мировому евангельскому христианству также дает им чувство принадлежности ко всей семье Божией, которая не дискриминирует разнообразие. Евангельские убеждения делают славянских баптистов способными к более инклюзивному мировоззрению. В их случае радикальная Реформация с ее многогранным наследием и мировоззрением служит в качестве путеводителя для интеграции в общество Австралии.

Ключевые слова: Австралия, баптисты, беженцы, Бог, вера, евангельский, иммигранты, интеграция, мировоззрение, общество, Реформация, славянский баптист, церковь.

Saviour, the God who is in control of all affairs across all countries. God is omnipresent, perceived through His personal touch of care and provision. He is the God of hope, who always lifts up their spirits in times of anxiety and despair. This is all consistent with their experiences as displaced people, refugees in third countries and immigrants. This God welcomed them in Australia through His other children – the Australian Baptists, who are *their* brothers and sisters in Christ. The involvement with local Baptists helped them to establish Slavic Baptist Churches in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. It enabled them to establish and maintain networks with all kinds of Evangelical Christians. Slavic Baptists love Australia and Australians because of the good experiences they have with the Australian Baptists, who they consider their brothers and sisters. Therefore any local Baptist Church is *their* Church, and Australian Evangelicals belong to the category of *our people*, which is very important for immigrants.

As data indicates, Slavic Baptists are characterised more by religion (faith) than by ethnicity. The inclusive ‘Slavic’ rather than ‘Russian’ or ‘Ukrainian’ is distinctive evidence of this, while the very identification as being Baptists gives these people a sense of belonging to Australian Baptists and other Evangelical Christians. Being a part of world Evangelical Christianity in this way also gives them a sense of belonging to the whole family of God, which does not discriminate based on differences. Their Evangelical beliefs enable Slavic Baptists to hold a more inclusive globalised worldview. In their case the Radical Reformation with its multifaceted heritage and worldview serves as a pathway for integration into the mainstream Australian society.

Key words: Australia, Baptists, refugees, God, faith, Evangelical, immigrants, integration, worldview, society, Reformation, Slavic Baptists, church.

* Имеется в виду мировоззрение представителей Радикальной Реформации.

Slavic Baptist Churches have been ministering to Slavic people around Australia since the end of the 1940s, with the exception of the Brisbane church, which traces its origin to 1932. The Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church of Victoria, Melbourne¹, originated in spring (September) 1948, the Sydney Slavic Baptist Church started in 1949, the Adelaide Slavic Baptist Church – in 1950, and the Slavic Baptist Church in Perth – in 1951.² All these churches are doing well, continuously adapting to new situations and challenges. As ethnic churches, they were founded by Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and other immigrants, that came to Australia after World War II from Germany, China, Persia and other countries. There have been three main waves of immigration³ which originated and impacted the Slavic Baptist Churches in Australia: first wave, refugees from Europe, 1947 to 1952; second wave, refugees from China, mid 1950s to mid 1970s; third wave, immigrants from the former Soviet Union, since 1991.

Slavic Baptists, who immigrated and are still immigrating to Australia, are descendants of the Radical Reformers along with other Baptists around the world. They find themselves in a kind of ethnic-religious counter-directed relationship. Slavic Baptists in Australia are, ethnically speaking, a marginal group of immigrants alongside other Slavic people, but at the same time they are affiliated with Australian Baptists. The thesis of this writing is, that their Radical-Reformed religious worldview, faith and beliefs facilitate their identification with mainstream Australian society through Australian Evangelical Christians, and help them in their integration process.⁴

Worldview is a system of principles, views, values, ideals and convictions, which define the relationship to reality, the general understanding of the world, and the position in life.⁵ It “constitutes an overall perspective on life that sums up what we know about the world, how we evaluate it emotionally, and how we respond to it volitionally”.⁶ The Protestant Reformed worldview of Baptists can be traced back to the worldview of the Radical Reformation of the 16th century in Europe and England, which later spread to the Russian Empire, where it has synthesised with its ‘home grown Protestants’ –

¹ The main source of information in this article is the research on this Church, undertaken in the second half of the 1990s, which was published in, Viktor Zander, *Identity and Marginality among New Australians* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), but also the inside information of the author, as an active participant and observer of the Slavic Baptist Community in Australia since 1991.

² P. James, *Slavyanskiye Baptistiskiye Tserkvi v Avstralii* (Izdatel'stvo: Soyuz Slavyanskikh Evangel'skikh Khristian Baptistov Avstralii, 1987). [P. James, *Slavic Baptist Churches in Australia* (Publisher: Slavic Evangelical Baptist Union of Australia, 1987)].

³ K.M. Hotimsky, *Russians in Australia* (Melbourne: Unification, 1957). He distinguishes four streams of Russian immigration to Australia, three of which are under scope of this study and are called ‘waves’.

⁴ It should be honestly stated that the immigrants’ road to integration is not a smooth process that is headed in one direction. The forces of differentiation, like alienation and marginality, are opposing integration and attempt to make it difficult for immigrants to integrate. But the focus of this writing is integration, so it will not deal with differentiation at all.

⁵ B.G. Yudin, “Mirovozzrenie” in *Philosophsky Slovar'*, 7- e izd, edited by I.T. Frolov (Moskva: Iz-vo “Respublika”, 2001 [“Worldview” in *Dictionary of Philosophy*], 334.

⁶ R.A. Makkreel, “Dilthey, Wilhelm” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Third edition, gen. ed. Robert Audi (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 273.

Molocans, Doukhobors and others.⁷ Though some authors, like Broadbent⁸, start with the First Church from the time of the apostles, tracing from then the path of suffering and persecutions, but also love and solidarity, between disciples of Christ, for whom the family of God had the priority over blood relatives. As it looks like the radical reformers trusted more their co-disciples from other nations and ethnic groups than their own compatriots.⁹ Radical reformers often had to flee from persecution, change places and countries of residence following literally Jesus' advise "when you are persecuted in one place, flee to another" (Mt.10:23)¹⁰. This was the life style of many Radical reformers¹¹, who were more concerned with their heavenly citizenship (Phil.3:20) and the "eternal house in heaven" (2Cor.5:1). Some Slavic Baptists were brought up in this way of thinking, which was informed by this particular oral tradition, that covers life stories of Evangelical Christians who were persecuted and imprisoned, tortured and even killed for their faith¹², which Prokhorov calls "legends of brotherhood"¹³. Radical reformers' real family were those, who were concerned with having a close relationship with God, as it was for Jesus, "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt.12:50). In Australia believers of Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Yugoslav, and other backgrounds, uprooted from their blood families by war and post-war experiences, became a spiritual family.¹⁴ This worldview is reflected by the following Loktev's words, "For God there are no nationalities. He has children, who are doing his will, and sinners, who do not accept his mercy".¹⁵

A very important criterion in the formation of the immigrants' worldview is their understanding of God.¹⁶ According to a research findings¹⁷, the post-war immigrants' tendency is to think of God in terms of Him as the Saviour. Believers of this group maintain that personal salvation is the most important thing, and especially the faith in Jesus as the Saviour.¹⁸ According to these people, the faith in God helped them to survive the struggles and hardships of the war and post-war times. Their perception of God's activity as God the Saviour is consistent with their experiences of hardship under communist

⁷ For detailed description and analysis, see, E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis Ltd, 1931), chapter 15; S.V. Sannikov, *Dvatisat' Vekov Khristianstva, Tom 2: Vtoroe Tysyacheletie* (Odessa: Iz-vo OBS "Bogomysliye", 2001), 505-520; and most recently, K. Prokhorov, *Russkii Baptizm i Pravoslaviye* (Moskva: Iz-vo BBI, 2017).

⁸ E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis Ltd, 1931).

⁹ See, Broadbent; S.V. Sannikov (ed.), *Menno Simons i Anabaptisty* (Steinhagen: Samenborn, 2012); K. Prokhorov, *Russkii Baptizm i Pravoslaviye*, especially his quotations.

¹⁰ Direct quotations from the Bible are from the New International Version.

¹¹ Sannikov, *Menno Simons I Anabaptisty*.

¹² Ioann Mark (Galust'yan), *Istoriya Moei Zhizni* (Korntal: Svet na Vostoke, 2004); S. Stepnyak-Kravchinskii, *Shtundist Pavel Rudenko* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoye izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury. 1984).

¹³ Prokhorov, *Russkii Baptizm i Pravoslaviye*, 363-384.

¹⁴ This fact was accentuated by the majority of the interviewees.

¹⁵ G.I. Loktev, *Moi Vospominaniya* (Adelaide: Privately published, no date), 2. He was born in the Uralsk Region, 1932 he as many others crossed the Soviet border to China, and in 1965 he came to Australia.

¹⁶ It is rather of elemental than of a theological-reflective character.

¹⁷ Refer to footnote 2.

¹⁸ H. Kopiec, interview by author, 16.09.1996, Noble Park, tape recording, author's private archive.

rule, as displaced people in Germany and their immigration to Australia. Many of these immigrants recall incredibly stressful situations, like an elderly woman who was once almost executed by the Germans. She twice survived when she was in houses destroyed by bombing. She survived the death of two husbands and all of her children. She survived starvation by working for a kind-hearted German family. She was able to escape from repatriation to a Ukraine ruled by Communists.¹⁹ All people of this group became believers in Displaced People's camps in Germany. The above mentioned lady became a Christian through the missionary work of Countess Lieven from France. Some of these converts joined local Baptist Churches there and were treated lovingly by German believers who, according to them, were the "products of the same blood of Christ".²⁰ These stories could be continued, all of them testifying to the struggle for life, peace and freedom. Therefore salvation, first experienced as survival and liberation, became a key reason for their existence. It was the God who saved them, God the Saviour, who was the object of their belief. They were all very excited about God and His role in their salvation, both physical and spiritual. This God was not a territorial or an Orthodox' God, but the God of all believers, regardless of nationality or denomination. The people with this understanding of God have laid the foundation of the Slavic Baptist Churches in Australia.

The immigrants of the second wave view God as omnipresent, perceived through the personal touch of care and provision.²¹ They see Him as transcending all geographic, political and cultural boundaries made by people, and Who is present in people's lives in practical ways. This view was shaped by their experiences as refugees in China and immigrants in Australia.²² Some of them, while waiting for their travel documents to Australia were attending Chinese and English Evangelical Churches in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Some of them were baptised by Chinese pastors there.²³ This is consistent with their more global worldview that was enabled by their view of God. Their children's perception of God is similar to their parents'. They see Him as 'God Who is there'²⁴, who can be experienced in worship and life. They are experientially aware of His presence and communicate with Him.²⁵

The view of God among immigrants of the third wave is consistent with their experience as newcomers to a new country. Therefore, they think of God predominantly as the 'God of hope and support' in life.²⁶ It means He brought them to Australia, revealed Himself

¹⁹ H. Kopiec, interview.

²⁰ E. Levchenko, interview by author, 16.06.1997, Endeavour Hills, tape recording, author's private archive; H. Kopiec, interview.

²¹ S. Timofeev, interview, by author, 14.01.1997, St Albans, tape recording, author's private archive

²² S. Timofeev, interview; T. Kapranova, interview by author, 2.10.1997, Dandenong, tape recording, author's private archive.; S. Antonova, interview by author, 9.09.1996, Noble Park, tape recording, author's private archive.

²³ N. Porublev, interview.

²⁴ V. Turko, interview by author, 3.11.1997, Hampton Park, tape recording, author's private archive.

²⁵ V. Turko, interview; S. Shigrow, interview by author, 9.11.1997, Malvern, tape recording, author's private archive.

²⁶ Y. Perov, interview by author, 23.11.1997, Malvern, tape recording, author's private archive.

to them (for those who came as unbelievers), and has filled their hearts with hope for the future and the meaning of life.²⁷

Though there are differences in perception of the divine image among these Slavic Baptists, the data has shown that the whole community is characterised by a worldview whereby God is the major focus of their identification. Therefore Slavic Baptists Churches are inclusive in nature, which has its theological roots in the believers' understanding of God and His creation. These people believe in the existence of only one Church, because there is only one God and one Bible.²⁸ This fact of inclusiveness is due to the worldview of its members, to their understanding of the transcendental ordering of things, or objectification.²⁹ From the beginning, there were contacts with other Slavic Evangelicals in Germany, France, England, Argentina, Brazil, USA and other countries, mostly due to relationships established in Displaced People camps.³⁰ In this way, the Slavic believers had a world-wide network as far back as the 1950s. They felt themselves to be members of the world Slavic Baptist and Baptist community, since they were an integrated part of the Australian Baptists and other Evangelical Christians in different countries. The first believers, the pioneers of these Churches, saw the bigger picture. The first edition of the printed journal, *Bratsky Bulletin* already dealt with the unity of all believers, including Australians. The business aspect of this issue dealt with the organisation of a Slavic Union and its place among the Australian Baptists. The Slavic Church in Melbourne also had contacts with the Baptist World Alliance as early as 1954, when its president, Dr. Tomas Lord, visited the Church. In his address in honour of the prominent guest, its then pastor Vasily Shadrin affirmed that "we, Slavic Baptists, love our world brotherly Union and we always eagerly pray for the strengthening and multiplication of its unity. ... We should remember that Christ desires the unity of believers, and He prayed to His Heavenly Father that all believers in all the world would be one."³¹

Though there were some earlier contacts. There are reports that the Australian Baptists³² contributed financially to the building of the Gospel House [Дом Евангелия] in St Petersburg organised by William Fetler, the main Hall of which had a capacity of 2,000 people.³³ Its inauguration and dedication was on Christmas 1911, which among many other international guests was also attended by Dr. A.D. Packer, an Australian Baptist leader.³⁴ Australian Baptists and other Evangelicals supported the Russian Missionary

²⁷ Y. Perov, interview; M. Grishina, interview by author, 14.10.1997, Glen Waverley, tape recording, author's private archive.

²⁸ This view is maintained by all interviewees.

²⁹ H. Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, Agincourt, Canada: The Book Society of Canada Ltd., 1976. Objectification is one of the essential mechanisms in his social-scientific theory of religion.

³⁰ Ioann Mark, *Istoria moei Zhizni*.

³¹ Vasily V. Shadrin. "Delo Bozhiye v Avstralii". *Bratsky Bulletin* [Fraternal Bulletin] no. 3 (December 1954): 29.

³² M. Yasnovsky, *Peeps into Dark Russia: Some Personal Experiences* (Sydney, NSW: Russian Missionary Society, 1925), 21.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ O. Smith, *Osuzhdennyi v Sibir'* [Condemned to Siberia] 25th ed., (Washington, D.C.: Russian Bible Society, 1955); J. Fetler, *Sluzhenie Rossii: Epichesky Ocherk o Missionerskom Sluzhenii Wiliama Fetlera. 1883-1957* [Ministry to Russia: Epic Essay about the Missionary Ministry of Wiliam Fetler. 1883-1957] (Odessa: "Bogomyslie", 1997), 26.

Society, founded in 1917 by William Fetler, a prominent Evangelist in the Russian Empire, had its representatives in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.³⁵ Madam Yasnovsky, a close co-worker of Fetler, was amazed about the enthusiasm of Australian Christians in helping the persecuted Christians in the Soviet Russia.³⁶ In her words, “the deep interest which the people of Australia have shown in the work of the Society has been encouraging to the fullest degree”.³⁷

Interestingly, some English speaking people (usually married to a Slavic person) are enjoying the warm fellowship and solid Bible teaching of Slavic Baptists. Each of the Churches has a translation ministry into English, and into Russian when the preaching is in English. In this way, everyone can understand and participate. For this reason, almost all the congregational songs also have an English text. Often the whole congregation sings a song in English. Inclusive vocabulary, such as ‘we’, ‘God’s family’ or ‘one in Christ’, is used. This gives everyone the feeling of belonging there, to belong to each other, to belong to God as a community. Since the early years of its existence, the Melbourne Church had their evening services in a more contemporary style and in the English language. In 1995 the Church established an English congregation in the second Church hall with a part time pastor.³⁸ Both services happened simultaneously and there was a single Sunday school, in the English language. After the services people of both parts of the same Church continued fellowshiping over a cup of tea. The Church Council consisted of leaders of both congregations and was conducted in English. This consciousness that all have *their* “own place in the heart of the loving God”³⁹, that they belong to *their* own community of faith, and this community transcends ethnic and political boundaries, enabled them to feel like part of the global community of all believers.

The majority of the Slavic Baptists see Australia as a gift from God, and immigration to it as an expression of His love. For the first-wave immigrants Australia has been synonymous with freedom. They are committed to this country, because it means shelter and improvement of quality of life. This commitment is a sort of a transference of their commitment to their homeland, the terrestrial and ideal.⁴⁰ These people are thankful to Australia and its people because they were taken in by them. One elderly person noted that “They accepted us broken people into their country, they gave us food and shelter, they treated us like people, they are kind”⁴¹. They had their family and Church where they could be themselves. Nobody came and “knocked on the door to take them away to Siberia”⁴². “These good people gave us a peaceful life, and I will thank God all my life for Australia and Australians”⁴³, is a typical emotional comment of the people of the

³⁵ M. Yasnovsky, *Manya: A True Story of Dark Russia*. Sydney, NSW: Russian Missionary Society, no date, 11; Yasnovsky, *Peeps into Dark Russia*, 38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39-41.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁸ Annual Business Meeting minutes, 27 July 1995, author’s private archive.

³⁹ Author’s definition of identity.

⁴⁰ Zander, *Identity and Marginality*, 178 ff.

⁴¹ H. Kopic, interview by author, 16.09.1996, Noble Park, tape recording, author’s private archive.

⁴² P. Dubyna, interview by author, 29.01.1998, Brighton, tape recording, author’s private archive.

⁴³ L. Dubyna, interview by author, 1.05.1997, Sunshine, tape recording, author’s private archive.

post-war immigration. One lady: “Australia is my homeland! ... I loved Australia immediately, and I still love Australia!”⁴⁴ One elderly lady, who came to Australia after WW2 expressed her affection to her new homeland in following words: “Австралия е мачеха, али добра мачеха, липше як рідна мате”⁴⁵ (Australia is a stepmother, but a good one, better than the birthmother).

The Slavic Baptists, according to interviews, feel closer to the Australian Baptists than to the Russian Orthodox because they share the same understanding of God, the same ritual of baptism and they consider them their brothers and sisters. When asked who is closer to them, their Russian Orthodox compatriots or the Australian Baptists, all of them gave answers like the following: “No, the believers, that means, the Australians, what do you think! Orthodox are Orthodox...”⁴⁶. Another lady: “Of course, closer are ours, not the Orthodox ... the Australian Baptists”.⁴⁷

Informants frequently reported that they felt rejected by the Russian Orthodox Church and its people. But they did not want to say negative things about their compatriots, except few which surfaced from time to time. For example, James⁴⁸ mentions in his book, that in 1965 he published articles of Nicolay Vodnevsky in the Russian newspaper “Edineniye”, which were very popular among Russian readers, according to many letters received from them. This provoked a wave of protests from the side of the Orthodox priests. It came to a point when “Bishop Antovy gave an ultimatum to Mr Amosov, the editor of the newspaper : ‘If you will not end the publishing of these articles we will announce a full boycott. We will forbid your newspaper from being sold in our parishes’”⁴⁹. Mr Amosov explained to Paul James, that because of this boycott he cannot publish these articles anymore. James phoned Bishop Antony the same day and asked for explanations. “Bishop Antony did not honour me with a definite explanation, broke our conversation up rudely and hung up the phone”.⁵⁰ Evidently, the leadership of the Orthodox Church would not see Baptists as Christians. When one new immigrant asked a priest in Melbourne (1997), “What is your opinion about Slavic Baptists?” he said: “It is a jewish-massonic sect”.⁵¹

These two examples show the negative attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church which isolated Slavic Baptists from their compatriots. Therefore, it is no surprise that in spiritual affairs and the founding of each of the Australian Slavic Baptist Churches, the Australian Baptists had a significant impact from their early days. As it will be demonstrated below, the Slavic Baptist pioneers have sourced help from their fellow believers, the Australian Baptists. These meaningful connections were established in the very early days and are still continuing. This becomes evident in the paragraphs below that describe shortly the origin of each Slavic Baptist Church.

⁴⁴ H. Kopiec, interview.

⁴⁵ L. Dubyna, interview.

⁴⁶ E. Levchenko, interview by author, 16.06.1997, Endeavour Hills, tape recording, author’s private archive.

⁴⁷ H. Kopiec, interview.

⁴⁸ James, *Slavyanskiye Baptistskiye Tserkvi v Avstralii*, 42.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ In Russian: жидомассонская секта. This informant wanted to remain anonymous.

The first church services in Brisbane,⁵² back in 1932 in the house of George Berezov, were actively supported by pastor Westwood, Liz Lovelock and Anne Green. There were obviously close connections established to the Baptists in their area. In fact, pastors A. Butler and S.M. Potter, President of the Baptist Union of Queensland, ordained G.N. Berezov to the pastoral ministry on the 4 December 1938. On the 14 December 1941, the first Slavic house of prayer in Australia was inaugurated. Five pastors and around 160 guests (the majority of them Australians) were present at this service. The *Queensland Baptist* journal from 15 January 1942 published an article about this occasion titled 'An unprecedented event'.

According to James⁵³, A. Obukhov was the central figure around whom Slavic believers organised the church in Sydney. During the initial stage he invited his compatriots to the services of the Dulwich Hill Church, where he himself was a member. Slavic believers liked the Australian services, but their lack of English was a great obstacle. Because of this, on the 20 November 1949, Slavic services were organised in a hall hired from the Rescue Work Society. The initial group comprised of 12 people under the leadership of A. Obukhov. On the 18 August 1957 the Sydney Slavic Baptist Church celebrated the inauguration of its own church building in Cabramatta, graced also by the presence of representatives from the Baptist Union of New South Wales.

Slavic believers in Melbourne⁵⁴ began their meetings in the rented house (formerly a horse stable) of Mr and Mrs Kupchinsky. Soon these premises could not fit all the believers, so the group was granted permission to hold their services in the Sunday School hall of the Kew Baptist Church. The first two baptisms were performed by an Australian pastor. In 1951 the Church moved into the premises of the Baptist House of the state of Victoria. That same year the Slavic Baptist Church became a member of the Baptist Union of Victoria. Following the recommendation of this Union on the 30 November 1958, 73 members of the Slavic church merged with the 12 members of the Richmond Baptist Church⁵⁵ and became one church under this name. There were two services conducted by a bilingual pastor on Sundays: 9.30 am in English, 11.00 am in Slavic languages. Some years later the church, renamed to 'Slavic Baptist Church', became the sole owner of the building. However, the church premises became too small after a significant number of immigrants from China (mid 1960s- mid 1970s) joined the church. The Baptist Union of Victoria facilitated the move of the Slavic Baptist Church into the building of the former Malvern Baptist Church in East Malvern in November 1976⁵⁶, where the Church still meets today.

In Adelaide⁵⁷ the first fellowships of Slavic believers in 1950 were held in private homes. Later they met in the hall of the Alberton Baptist Church. Rev Davis, the pastor

⁵² This paragraph is sourced from James, *Slavyanskiye Baptistskiye Tserkvi v Avstralii*, 12-13.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15-17.

⁵⁴ This paragraph was sourced from James, *Slavyanskiye Baptistskiye Tserkvi v Avstralii*, 18-22; Manning, J.G. *Builders for God. Melbourne: Victorian Baptist Home Missionary Society, 1971*, 75-86. N. Porublev, interview, and others.

⁵⁵ L. Chekhovich, interview by author, 13.03.1998, Mulgrave, tape recording, author's private archive

⁵⁶ N. Porublev, interview.

⁵⁷ This paragraph is sourced from James, *Slavyanskiye Baptistskiye Tserkvi v Avstralii*, 23-26.

of this church, helped the believers of the Slavic group in many ways: He administered Communion, gave them advice, love and pastoral care.

In Perth in the beginning of 1951, Yan Banakhovsky started meetings of believers in homes, attended by about ten people. These fellowships were conducted in Russian, Ukrainian and Polish. Some time later, 10 June 1951, this group began its meetings in the premises of the North Perth Baptist Church. The first two baptisms were conducted by an Australian pastor, Rev Freeman. On the 17 April 1965 the newly built Church facility in Victoria Park was inaugurated. On this occasion two people preached: “brother I. K. Doroshenko, president of the Slavic Baptist Association, and brother Freeman, president of the Baptist Union of Western Australia”.⁵⁸

The second wave immigrants arrived in Australia at a much better time than the first. The Australian Council of Churches and the Slavic Baptist Church had helped them to come to Australia.⁵⁹ After the hostile environment in China these people felt as though they “were in heaven”⁶⁰, and were grateful to Australia. Their minimal expectation – to live peacefully without being hungry – was met. When asked if they felt they belonged to the global Evangelical community, one answer was: “Yes, I do. I think the Orthodox people ... can’t look at an Anglo-Saxon, or a Sri Lankan, or a Vietnamese and call him his brother, and we can”.⁶¹ Another person maintains that the Australian Baptists are more important for him than the Russian Orthodox, “because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We altogether are one, only different languages are between us”.⁶² The third wave immigrants see Australians as friendly and civilised people with a high cultural level. They also have a positive attitude to Australia because of the shelter, warmth and healthy food, which is available in abundance.⁶³ Australian Baptists are closer to them than their Orthodox compatriots because they share the same faith.⁶⁴ As one of the informants put it: “of course the Australian Baptist is closer. Because he has the same beliefs, that I have. He understands the Bible the way I do. He lives the life that Christians should live...”⁶⁵ Being part of a world-wide denomination makes them feel a part of the broader society of Australia and the world.

God is central to the Slavic believers. According to them, he blessed them by placing them in this amazing country, where they can actively participate at different levels. Therefore, Slavic Baptists in Australia enjoy a certain networking⁶⁶, the deepness of which depends on trust. There is a network of Christian culture which the Slavic Baptists form a part of. People become aware of opportunities for participation in Christian culture through various avenues. Firstly, Churches receive correspondence and advertising materials from

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁹ N. Porublev, interview by author, 2.10.1997, Glen Waverley, tape recording, author’s private archive.

⁶⁰ S. Timofeev, interview; N. Porublev, interview, and others.

⁶¹ V. Turko, interview by author, 16.10.1997, Hampton Park, tape recording, author’s private archive.

⁶² S. Timofeev, interview.

⁶³ Y. Perov, interview, and others.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ P. Diachevsky, interview.

⁶⁶ This topic is based on the inside knowledge of the author as an active participant-observer of the Slavic Baptist community since 1991 and countless conversations with Slavic people around Australia.

different Christian and para-Christian organisations. Secondly, there are denominational and inter-denominational newspapers and journals, which publish news from all around the world and place advertisements from different organisations, Churches and individuals. Thirdly, use is made of the *Directory of Christian Business*, published from time to time and sent to Churches for free distribution. In addition to these, some businesses display the sign of the fish, a symbol of Christianity, which attracts Christians. As result of this networking, Slavic Baptists use (on a regular basis) Christian travel agents, medical doctors, lawyers, real estate agents, accountants, and mechanics. Where possible, they go to Christian dentists, chiropractors, and when they have relationship problems they go to Christian marriage counsellors. Some members send their children to Christian childcares and schools. This networking testifies that Christians trust other Christians, and for the immigrants this is very important, as they often do not know whom they can trust. Because of this particular dynamic, the Christian networking also has economical benefits. There is less risk involved in business transactions because the network is empowered by trust based on the same beliefs and values. Therefore, the mechanisms of interaction and contracting work faster and more efficiently.

The networking among the Slavic Baptists themselves contribute to more cooperation and cohesion in the group. But the next circle of contacts, the network of Evangelical Christians, also contributes to the identification with the broader Australian society. Analysing the data above, at least three circles of networking within the community in focus can be highlighted. The first circle of networking is among Slavic Baptist believers themselves and Slavic people of other Evangelical denominations. The second circle are other Australian Baptists and Evangelicals. The third circle encompasses all other people, including Orthodox compatriots. These circles of networking could also be called circles of trust, based on the same worldview, values and honesty. In difference to Slavic Baptists, the Russian Orthodox community has only two of those circles. The first networking circle is the community itself. The second circle comprises the entire non-Orthodox Australian society, Slavic Baptists included. The two most important circles of networking for the Slavic Baptists are the members of their own community and other Evangelical Christians, who serve as a bridge to the wider Australian society.

An important network has been established at the level of Christian Missions and organisations. Through regular financial contributions Slavic Baptist Churches (as part of their state's Baptist Union) contribute to the life and wellbeing of people in Australia and abroad. Each Union and its member churches initiate and support humanitarian and Church planting projects. Representatives of different missions and Christian organisations come to Slavic Baptists, just like to other Churches, present their vision and work, and are often successful in getting spiritual and financial support from Slavic believers. Paul James⁶⁷, who was for many years its secretary, tells the story of the 'Voice of the Gospel'.⁶⁸ At the 21st Conference of the Slavic Evangelical Baptist Union of Australia it was decided to start its own mission 'Voice of the Gospel', which would broadcast radio programs into

⁶⁷ This paragraph is sourced from N. Porublev, interview and James, *Slavyanskiye Baptistskiye Tserkvi v Avstralii*, 38-39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

the communist ruled Soviet Union. On the 7 September 1974 the broadcasting started from a radio station in Monte Carlo. At first the mission was financed by the Slavic Union only, but as soon as Australian believers became aware of this project, they started to contribute generously to this cause. The fact that one of the Baptist churches in Melbourne, Australia, started to broadcast radio programs to the USSR was received by the Australian believers with great enthusiasm. The Baptist Union of Victoria, out of its Missionary Fund, contributed between \$1000 and \$3000 each year. The Slavic Baptist Church in Melbourne gave part of its premises for the use of the 'Voice of the Gospel' for free. This included a relatively professional studio for the purposes of recording and editing. The Baptist Union of Australia made an appeal to all Australian churches to support 'Voice of the Gospel' financially. The received funds enabled additional broadcasting of radio programs from San Francisco, California. In 1975 a new project 'Church by Radio' was launched. According to Paul James, "this was the only program in the world, which in a single hour broadcasted a full service, including Bible reading, choir singing, congregational singing and a sermon. It was broadcasted as it really happened in the church. This program was aimed towards those, especially in the Soviet Union, who wanted to attend a church, but for various reasons couldn't do so"⁶⁹. At the end of the 1980s, 'Voice of the Gospel' and 'Church by Radio' were broadcasted into the Soviet Union from three radio stations: Monte Carlo, San Francisco and Quito, Ecuador. After the fall of the Soviet Empire, radio broadcasting was reduced and 'Voice of the Gospel' refocused its work towards supporting local missionaries in the former Soviet Union and contributing towards building projects in rural areas. Australian Baptists and other Evangelical believers have always been a part of this work. As illustrated from these cases, the Slavic Baptists participate actively in the life of their denomination, as well as in the Australian Christian culture, and this also facilitates their identification with all Australians and Australia as a country. In contrast to this inclusive worldview of Slavic Baptists, it is not so easy for the Russian Orthodox community. Palakshappa⁷⁰ reports that their Russian-Orthodox worldview has to some extent hindered their full participation in the wider society. He finds that "in social and religious life the White Russians of Dandenong show exclusiveness. This is visible in the Orthodox Church, the rituals, and the friends and associations which begin and end (with few exceptions) within the ethnic community. The Dandenong Orthodox Church confirms and perpetuates their identity."⁷¹ Regarding future developments "there is a strong suggestion that the strength of key White Russian institutions (notably home, families and the church) will continue to retard the process of assimilation and identity change, for the community as a whole, for an indefinite period."⁷²

As it is evident, the Russian (speaking) Slavic Baptists form a marginal minority within the Russian Community in Australia because of their Protestant (in contrast to Russian Orthodox) worldview, but at the same time this worldview has enabled them to

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ T. Palakshappa, "Group Dynamics in Assimilation of White Russians in Dandenong" (Ph.D. diss., Monash University, Australia, 1971).

⁷¹ Ibid., 328.

⁷² Ibid., 330.

identify more easily with Australian society. Their Evangelical faith gives them the balance between differentiation and integration. As the research demonstrates, Slavic Baptists are characterised more by religion (faith) than by ethnicity.⁷³ The very identification of being Baptists gives these people a sense of belonging to Australian Baptists and other Evangelical Christians. This being a part of world Evangelical Christianity also gives them a sense of belonging to the global community of all believers in Christ. In their case the Radical Reformation with its multifaceted heritage and worldview serves as a pathway for integration into mainstream society. Their Evangelical beliefs enable Slavic Baptists to encompass a more inclusive globalised worldview. When they come to Australia any local Baptist Church is *their* Church, and Australian Evangelicals belong to the category of *our people*, which is very important for immigrants. They, as newcomers, have to deal with ethnic-cultural issues only, whereas their Orthodox counterparts, who were in the majority in their homeland, have to additionally face the fact of being a religious minority in the Australian context. So, both groups are not spared from the ongoing processes of integration and differentiation, but they experience them in different ways – though the research data demonstrates that the Baptist religious beliefs and worldview better facilitate the identification of Slavic Baptists with Australian society.

This positive identification with Australian Baptists is manifested by the fact that some Slavic immigrants, who have a good use of English, are attending local Baptist and other Evangelical Churches. They find themselves at home among their fellow believers and contribute in different ways to their local Baptist Churches. But others, valuing Russian as liturgical language and the warm family like fellowship, are attending Slavic Baptist Churches in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. These Churches are organised into the Slavic Evangelical Baptist Union of Australia and hold their conferences each year in a different capital city. These conferences are in fact “collective rituals of identification”⁷⁴ of likeminded immigrants and are held for the encouragement of Slavic Baptist ethnic communities. At the same time these Slavic Baptist Churches are affiliated with their particular state’s Baptist Union. For example, the Slavic Baptist Church WA (Perth) is an active member of the Baptist Union of Western Australia, and through it, it is linked to the Baptist Union of Australia and to the Baptist World Alliance, as well as to all Evangelical Protestant Christians. This is where they belong as heirs of the globalised worldview facilitated by the Radical Reformation.

⁷³ Zander, *Identity and Marginality*, 236.

⁷⁴ R. Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 3.

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