

RUSSKII BAPTISM I PRAVOSLAVIE (SERIIA "DIALOG") [RUSSIAN BAPTISM AND ORTHODOXY (SERIES "DIALOGUE"]]. BY CONSTANTINE PROKHOROV. MOSCOW: IZDATEL'STVO BBI. 2017. PP. 450. ISBN 978-5-89647-362-6; 590 RUB

Constantine Prokhorov's book opens up the largely unknown area of Orthodox influence on Russian Baptism. It is generally understood that Baptists oppose themselves to Orthodoxy and consciously distance themselves from everything considered a distinguishing feature of Orthodox culture. The author capably destroys this stereotype and calls attention to a multitude of indicators of Orthodox influence on Russian Baptism in the territory of the Soviet Union between 1960 and 1990. For long years Orthodox and Baptists lived in a common territory, walled off by the "Iron Curtain." It was precisely during this historical period that the harsh persecution of believers of the early Soviet period passed; however, confessions of faith continued to demand confessors, the living conditions of religious communities facilitated the appearance of an increasing number of contact points between Baptism and Orthodoxy. The facts that testify to this amazing closeness of experience between two so unlike confessions will be of interest and surprise to many readers, both Protestant and Orthodox.

Prokhorov is in full control of his material. The book examines and analyzes many aspects of religious life, from the official teaching of the church to the everyday customs and narratives common among believers. The author gives preference to facts and avoids premature generalizations. It is important for the objectivity of the author's research that he interviewed more than one-hundred known Baptist ministers who immigrated to the USA at the beginning of perestroika. These people have remained untouched by the transformations of post-Soviet Baptism, which began with the opening of the USSR's borders to foreign preachers and has brought native Baptist tradition closer to the traditions of the West.

Laying out the pre-history of the issue, the author delicately approaches sensitive themes of inter-confessional conflict between official Orthodoxy and the Protestant movements of the Russian Empire, at the same time demonstrating a thorough acquaintance with historical literature. We may agree with him that Russian Baptism, having roots in the European Reformation, is nevertheless a unique and "deeply national" (72) phenomenon. This two-sided nature has led to a situation in which extreme Protestant positions are expressed in the official documents of Baptist churches and in the statements of their leaders; meanwhile in everyday church practice, especially in smaller and more isolated communities, there are more elements that draw on Orthodox spirituality. One of the founders of the Reform (underground) Evangelical Christian-Baptist movement, Iu. K. Kriuchkov, observed: "We have unwittingly accepted our mentality from our Orthodox surroundings..." (229).

The author concludes that in the area of theology, Soviet Baptists made quite an original attempt to synthesize certain Protestant and Orthodox ideas. Orthodox concepts have especially influenced the teaching on salvation. Generally accepted views of salvation among Russian Baptists differ little from Orthodox teaching, holding to the principle of synergy between God and man. Native Baptists were “endlessly distant from the Calvinist teaching on salvation dominant among Western (European, American) Baptists” and knew nothing about Arminianism (87-88). The closeness of Baptist theology to the teaching of the Orthodox Church has also been facilitated by Protestant use of the Synodal translation of the Bible—that is, the “Orthodox” Bible—considering this translation the best of all in existence. Prokhorov rightly notes that any translation of Holy Scripture carries the stamp of the confessional affiliation of its translators (108). Besides this, every church has its own tradition of Scripture interpretation; that is, in fact, its own body of sacred tradition, even if the church’s doctrine rejects sacred tradition. In practice, this means that while proclaiming the Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura*, Soviet Baptists inevitably clung to the Orthodox understanding of Scripture (111) — this observation by the author is of great importance.

Chapters 3 to 7 are of particular interest, in which the author describes the liturgical and narrative tradition and subculture of Soviet Baptism. Closeness to Orthodox liturgical tradition is evident first of all in the attitude to baptism and communion as sacraments of the church. Although official Baptist theology avoids calling the Lord’s Supper a sacrament, in practice the attitude toward it differs little from the Orthodox attitude. The author states that it is characteristic for Baptists to observe a church fast from food and water on the Friday before the Eucharist, abstention from sexual relations on the day before, and a personal fast on the morning of communion, along with penitential prayers, reconciliation with neighbors, and forgiveness extended to all (154).

The influence of Orthodoxy on the liturgical tradition of Baptists may also be traced in the weekly and yearly cycles of worship. Besides common Christian liturgical days—Sundays—Baptists especially emphasize Wednesdays and Fridays as days to remember Christ’s suffering (in Orthodoxy Wednesdays and Fridays are fast days, thematically connected with the Lord’s suffering), and also Saturday in expectation and anticipation of Sunday (also in Orthodoxy Saturday is not considered a weekday). While Western Baptists, as a rule, celebrate only Christmas and Easter, the annual cycle of Soviet Baptists included several Orthodox holidays as well, connected with the commemoration of biblical events: the Lord’s baptism, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the Annunciation, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Pentecost, the Transfiguration (187). The author notes that the very order of worship in Baptist communities has an unwritten order, or, in the words of a member of the Presidium of the AUCECB, “inherited tradition” (197), which is extremely difficult to alter (198) and which also connects Baptists to Orthodoxy. Besides this, some congregations have adapted the liturgical esthetic of Orthodoxy with painted church decoration and even special clothing (209).

Believers from different confessions and denominations are especially brought closer by persecution. Soviet power unwittingly facilitated the coming together of Orthodox and Baptists. This closeness was especially clearly reflected in the use by Baptists of

Orthodox patristic literature (the works of St. John Chrysostom, patristic teaching from the Philokalia, which was most often printed without reference in the publications of Evangelical Christians), in various oral traditions, and in everyday practice. Thus, Prokhorov draws attention to the phenomenon of miracle-working objects, which in the Orthodox context appeared primarily in stories about icons or crosses worn around the neck that were miraculously preserved in times of persecution, during searches, and fires, and among Baptists in tales of miraculously saved copies of Holy Scripture, so that not only the Scripture, but also the object—the physical book—in the eyes of an ordinary Baptist carries “the stamp of God’s grace” (216). In this way, as the author convincingly demonstrates, among Soviet Baptists there was a concept of the holiness of physical objects rooted in the Orthodox teaching on the veneration of icons.

At first glance, the author’s description of the “monastic way” of Soviet Baptism may seem completely unexpected. While they did not call themselves monastics, many brothers and sisters in Baptist churches nevertheless chose what in fact was a monastic lifestyle, describing the fellowship with monastic images and terminology. The author points out that women who joined a Baptist community were often consigned to a monastic life, since there were so many more sisters than brothers (230).

The reader may be surprised by the relationship to the faithful among Baptists, which is close to the veneration of saints among the Orthodox. The author gives the example of the widespread stories among Baptists of the ministers I. A. Laptev and I. V. Ivolin, which contain elements typical of hagiographic narrative (243–45). At the same time, similar stories circulated about Orthodox ascetics of piety.

Prokhorov’s book would be useful for religious studies specialists as well as for Protestant and Orthodox believers who wish to know one another and their own traditions better. This is the first work to handle this theme in such a many-sided and comprehensive way. A. Murzin insisted on the necessity for native Protestants to study Orthodox tradition in his book *Dialog s pravoslaviam* [Dialogue with Orthodoxy] (Kyiv: Svet na vostoce, 2013). It is no less important for Protestants to know the elements of Orthodox tradition in Baptist movements. It is important that Prokhorov writes respectfully about both traditions, not accenting polemical issues, but showing many points of contact. Respectful examination of one another’s legacy is the beginning of true dialogue.

*Andrei Dudchenko*  
*Presbyter, Ukrainian Orthodox Church*  
*Kyiv, Ukraine*