

*APOKALIPSIS: PROSTO I PONIATNO O SAMOI ZAGADOCHNOI KNIGE BIBLIJ.*  
[APOCALYPSE: SIMPLY AND CLEARLY ABOUT THE MOST MYSTERIOUS  
BOOK OF THE BIBLE] TIMOFEI MEDVEDEV. MOSKVA: EKSMO, 2017,  
288 p.; ISBN 978-5-699-93597-0 (Hbk); 300 RUB.\*

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Today the situation on the post-Soviet area is such that any publication written by a local Evangelical author is a remarkable event in making and development of theology. Especially, when this is a publication on biblical interpretation aimed at wider audience and printed in large quantity. T. Medvedev's is the book which (1) claims to be a commentary on the Apocalypse of John; (2) targeted on the wider circle of readers and distributed through a large bookselling chain; (3) published by one of the largest publishing house in the quantity of 2,000 copies. Though the book is not academic, when someone considers (a) the state of the local Evangelical theology and biblical interpretation and (b) potential spread of the book, then the writing and publishing of a critical review seems appropriate.

On the first reading the book gives an impression that its volume artificially increased by the usage of larger line and paragraph spacing. Some paragraphs of the text consist only of one or two sentences (see pp. 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 19, etc.) The book contains the full text of Apocalypse in the Russian Synodal translation without any comments or notes by the author.

The author sporadically refers to the meaning of different Greek words (pp. 28, 29, 46, 134, 182, 201, 210, 223). The sentence explaining the meaning of the word «apocalypse» (“The word ‘apocalypse’ comes from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις which means ‘revelation, disclosing or taking off the veil’”) occurs in the text twice (see pp. 9, 28). Here the word is in Greek but in other cases it is transliterated in Latin or Cyrillic. Sometimes the author proposes unexpected and unsupported insights about word meanings, for instance: “‘Nicolaitan’ – is a Greek word meaning ‘one who subdues people’” (p. 46). But in fact the word is a derivative from the name *Nicolaus* and points to a group of followers of a person who had such name.

A reader may wonder what is the genre of Medvedev's book. On the one hand, I. Kniazev's commendation describes it as a deep and sound research performed on the highest theological level. M. Morgulis characterises it as “spiritual research”. Composition of the book fits the structure of the commentaries explaining the Bible text. However, after acquaintance with the material a reader should admit this is neither a commentary nor a research. Perhaps, it could be labelled as spiritual reflections which have intuitive rather than research character. The style and structure of the book resembles an expanded outline of a public speech which contains key points without any argumentation and development

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of the designated thoughts. There is no information about the copy-editor; literary style is not a strong side of the publication. The question about the book's genre concerns another problem – for whom it could be beneficial and interesting and when someone needs to turn to its content?

The author's hermeneutical approach to the Book of Revelation represents a variation of "futurist" reading; conclusions of this trajectory are determined by the author's dispensational view on history and Christian eschatology. References to the historical context of the book are fragmental and inconsistent (e.g., p. 12, 53).

The interpretation of the text is based on the supposition that the book of Revelation contains predictive prophesies relevant to the realities of contemporary humans living in the times of technological progress. Militaristic rhetoric is not rare in the text. For instance, interpreting judgement of the fifth trumpet (Rev. 9) and the image of the locusts coming from the smoke the author first points to the view that the text "describes biological weapon here, that is viruses such as flu" and continues "though further description of the appearance points to combat vehicles of contemporary armies such as helicopters, tanks, unmanned vehicles and use of missiles" (p. 124).

China and Muslim countries take a special place in this interpretation of the Revelation. The author sees their image while interpreting Rev. 9:16 on the opinion that "two thousands of thousands" equals two hundred million soldiers which "in our times China or altogether forty Muslim countries can deploy" (p. 130). Again, colours of horses fit China popular colours: "...China's banner is red-yellow, the majority of Chinese army clothed in blue uniform, China is called yellow threat, and flame-breathing dragons with large heads – favourite Chinese symbol (p. 130). Interesting that earlier a respected Evangelical leader wrote describing battle in the valley of the Euphrates river: "We mean China which has four hundred fifty million citizens, Japan, Korea, Siam and others like them" (p. 210).<sup>1</sup> History of interpretation of the Apocalypse knows many examples when interpreter saw in the text exclusively his contemporary realities: Muslim invasion, Roman popes and the institute of papacy itself, Protestant Reformation, French Revolution, different political leaders: Charlemagne, Mussolini, Joseph Stalin etc. Though such reading aims at making the text and its message relevant for contemporary reader, the approach raises serious philosophical-hermeneutical and theological issues: are these images related to the Old Testament apocalyptic tradition? If yes, then how and what should be the starting point for interpretation – hermeneutical perspective of a person formed by political circumstances and technological progress or interpretation of contemporary realities from the perspective of the message contained in the Bible texts? If we claim that the text contains the prophesy exclusively for contemporary political realities and technological achievements, then how should we treat the Christians who lived before us, including the first addressees of the Apocalypse, or those Christians who live in the countries where technological progress is not flourishing and political situation is different from ours? Consequently, the question follows – does it mean that these readers do not have proper worldview and hermeneutical

<sup>1</sup> I.V. Kargel *Tolkovtel, Otkrovenia Sviatogo Ioanna Bogoslova* [Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John the Theologian]. (St-Petersburg: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1991).

presupposition for an adequate understanding of the text? These questions uncover fundamental theological problem – such understanding of the text makes it relevant only for a “small group of readers” and irrelevant for all other Christians, including our predecessors. Evangelical understanding of the text does not allow one to agree with such a conclusion.

The problem described above is related to another peculiarity of perception of the text of Apocalypse by T. Medvedev – understanding of the seven letters (Rev. 2-3) as periodization of the Church history. Such an approach is widely spread but this does not exempt it from serious questioning. Every attempt at periodization of the Church history through the lens of seven letters in the Book of Revelation is of subjective nature. Analysis of the approach concerns not so much relevancy of the proposed chronological limits as the resolution of a more substantial question – whether such attitude towards the text is correct in principle? Acquaintance with such interpretation inescapably demonstrates the following: its proponents think of their own epoch as the time of the Laodicean period which, according to Rev. 3:14-22 is characterised by economic wellbeing and flourishing of the Church leading it to “cooling” and spiritual lukewarmness, that is, uselessness. The fundamental problem of this view is its presupposition that God’s Church, consisting of different ethnic groups and situated on different continents of the planet Earth, is characterised with universal condition and challenges that change in the sequential calendar-like manner. It means that if they suffer, die as martyrs, experience difficulties with dogmatic self-determination and bliss in luxury then necessarily altogether and simultaneously. Of course, this is not the case. If the text of the Book of Revelation is concerned, then it is clear the following: (1) all seven churches did really exist in this region in the second half of the first century; (2) the problem which the members of the Laodicea church encountered was indeed the problem of functional uselessness caused by the material wellbeing and self-sufficiency; (3) another church, say in Pergamum, has different problems which are not related to economic wellbeing and self-sufficiency; (4) both churches, in Laodicea and Pergamum, existed in the same historical epoch which the proponents of the view designate as the Ephesian period. If the Laodicean period is evaluated from the perspective of its relatedness to the contemporary realities of Church’s life in the world<sup>2</sup> then how relevant are attempts to expose economic self-sufficiency, luxury and wealth for the persecuted Christians of North Korea, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan. The raised questions can be a point of departure for further thinking of the text of the Revelation and dialogue with the author.

Finally, another, perhaps, the most important observation should be made. Exposition of Rev. 17:9 significantly differs in style from the rest of the book. An examination of the text, which begins on page 212 with the words “American anti-emigrant movement, known as nativism...” and finishes on p. 215 with transition to the commentary on 17:10, confirms that this passage represents the text of the article by Alexey Komlev “Where did the Adventist anti-Catholicism come from?” [Otkuda poshel adventistskii antikatlitsizm?] published on the web-page “Theology and Life” [Bogoslovie i zhizn] 26.11.2010 [theologian.msk.ru] and Baznica.info 13.11.13. The text of the article is not

<sup>2</sup> The author himself uses this technic – “If one distracts... and soberly looks at the contemporary world,” p. 206.

marked with quotation marks and does not have references to the source or the author. At the same time the text is used fully and verbatim which means it should be classified as plagiarism and grossest violation of writer's ethics.

In spite of the existing scarcity of materials for the study of the Book of Revelation in Russian the reviewed book has a low potential for the contribution to theological dialogue and comprehension of the text of the Apocalypse. Nevertheless, this publication has value for it leads serious students to resolve the tasks related to the perception of the text of the Revelation by some representatives of contemporary Evangelical Christianity. That is, it is possible on the basis of this publication to analyse existing hermeneutical paradigm of perception of the biblical text, evaluate level of mastering basic material related to the study and interpretation of the Bible texts including the sources belonging to the corpus of apocalyptic literature.

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*ИСТОРИЯ АНАБАПТИЗМА. РАДИКАЛЬНАЯ РЕФОРМАЦИЯ XVI ВЕКА.  
[THE ANABAPTIST STORY. AN INTRODUCTION TO SIXTEENTH-CENTURY  
ANABAPTISM] Уильям Р. Эстеп [WILLIAM R. ESTEP]. КИЕВ.:  
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Данную книгу можно без преувеличения назвать классическим трудом по истории Радикальной Реформации XVI века. Известный американский баптистский историк, профессор Уильям Р. Эстеп (1920–2000), признанный авторитет в области истории анабаптизма, живым языком описывает хронологию возникновения и распространения этого движения. Кем были анабаптисты XVI века? Где начало этого движения? Каковы их отношения с магистерскими протестантами? Является ли движение крещенцев определенного рода ответвлением и разновидностью в рамках Реформации? Каковы главные побудительные причины возникновения движения? Что думали анабаптисты о Боге, человеке, церкви, крещении, христианской жизни? На эти и другие вопросы можно найти ответы на страницах этой книги.

*История анабаптизма* – это первый труд, переведенный на русский язык, который столь всесторонне и объемно освещает рассматриваемую тему. Уникальность

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