

Traditional Russian-speaking Baptist Worship in Orthodox Context

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Public worship plays a prominent role in the life of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, performing a preparatory and interpretive function in the everyday experiences of believers. Together with the ethical component, public worship is the principal manifestation of belonging to the church. Describing their attendance of worship, AUECB senior pastors and leaders used such lofty descriptions as “extraordinary meeting of the redeemed,”^[1] “blessed prayer meetings,”^[2] “solemn divine service,”^[3] or “blessed hours in joyful communion like on Mount Tabor^[4]” They noted that those who attended “with unearthly delight listened to our word,”^[5] and though “the meeting lasted for three hours, nobody wanted to leave.”^[6] A well-known hymn which is frequently performed “before the start of worship” illustrates the reverent attitude toward the worship service:

The time has come for us to pray.
Faith shall bring us near,
At the feet of Christ we lay
Sin and all our fears.

This we have to know in faith:
He extends His embrace
Sending His abundant blessings
Unto us all the days.

Wondrous prayer time!
Wondrous prayer time!
Sweetest fellowship, no sweeter!
Filled with Power Divine.^[7]

^[1] *Bratskii vestnik* [Fraternal messenger], No. 1 (1945): 44.

^[2] *Bratskii vestnik*, No. 3 (1945): 15.

^[3] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

^[4] *Bratsky vestnik*, No. 1 (1946): 43.

^[5] *Bratsky vestnik*, No. 3 (1948): 52.

^[6] *Bratsky vestnik*, No. 6 (1947): 48.

However, not much attention was given to understanding of the service. When Baptists in Belarus were asked, “Why does your church use this worship pattern?” most of the people answered, “It is our tradition.”^[8] Yet we recognize that traditional worship in Belarusian Baptist churches is the product of specific historic developments, and its features reveal the influence of the context in which the evangelical movement started and developed. Without doubt, we must not lose sight of the Western vector, above all the connection with German and American believers. Many churches received their initial impulse from German and American churches and were founded before the Belarusians were acquainted with the evangelical movement in familiar Slavic surroundings within the territory of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union; therefore the roots of their practice can be found in the evangelical churches of the West. But the Evangelical movement grew in traditional Orthodox and Slavic cultural soil; those who got acquainted with «Western» Christianity were people with the (usual) Orthodox pedigree and their own understanding of spirituality,^[9] which, by the way, became one of the reasons contributing to tensions in the internal conflicts of evangelical worship. This tension characterizes the EC-B churches today as well, expressing itself in the combination of sacramental and symbolic approaches to “religious rites” (different understandings about what happens during the Lord’s Supper); in a different understanding of freedom and order in the service (is there any need for a “sermon schedule?”); in the conflict of analytical (rational) and intuitive knowledge of the truth (is it necessary to prepare for sermons, or is it enough to pray, relying on the leading of the Spirit?)

In this research we will pay special attention to the religious (Orthodox) surroundings. However, we will not disregard the political context which played an important role in the building of the culture and spirit of the worship meeting. The origin and spread of the evangelical movement in the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet Union took place in the context of malevolence, hostility, and opposition, constant pressure from the outside, and attempts to interfere in community meetings. Hostile relations outside the prayer house formed a special type of worship service, built on opposition to and separation from the world (as an illustration we may take images that reflect the nature of conflict with the world, such as the idea of the struggle/sacred war,

^[7] *Pesn’ vozrozhdeniia* [Song of revival]. A Collection of Hymns and Songs of Evangelical Churches (Minsk, 1995), no. 2. First stanza and refrain. *Pesn’ vozrozhdeniia* is the most widely used songbook in all the churches that follow a traditional style of worship. It has had several editions: the first (underground) 1978 edition by the Council of ECB Churches contained 830 hymns and the three latest editions include 2500, 2800 and 5000 songs respectively. From 2000 to 2012, churches have been using mainly the quoted edition, containing 1316 songs.

^[8] Survey of members of Minsk churches adhering to the traditional style of worship, January 2008. The noteworthy answers included: “Everybody does so.” “It is the best order.” “We’ve

never solved the problem of the order and form of meetings.”

^[9] The role of attachment to the Orthodox Church and its impact on the people should not be exaggerated. It is significant that after the Bolshevik Revolution, when the decree on separation of church and state was published (23 November 1918) and the authorities started to battle against religion, the people began to turn away from Orthodoxy in large numbers and even move into atheism. One cannot deny that there were many true Orthodox people ready for martyrdom to defend their faith, but for the majority of Orthodox believers Christianity was a tradition or just part of their national identity.

an emphasis on suffering for one's faith, and the eschatological aspect).^[10] But the political context must be the subject of a separate study.

Evangelical and Orthodox churches: The conflict

Liturgy plays a dominant role in Orthodox worship. Primarily, Orthodoxy is a church doing public liturgy.^[11] When an Anglican minister asked Patriarch Aleksii of Moscow to describe the Orthodox Church in one sentence, he was famously told, "It is the church that celebrates the Divine Liturgy."^[12] Considering the fact that almost all the pioneers of the evangelical movement in Belarus came out of an Orthodox environment, it is surprising that the Baptists rejected that familiar, rich, and valuable form, and preferred to adopt a simple fellowship of co-religionists, consisting of unsophisticated Bible interpretation, simple-hearted and naive prayers, and common non-professional singing (the last element developed very much in the process of the growth of the movement). How could a Belarusian who had a high regard for ritual and liturgy go along the path of "reduction of Christian tradition"? How could he turn to an "alien faith" if "everything he is looking for [is] in Orthodoxy?"^[13]

Without doubt, however, the most important reason for withdrawal from Orthodoxy was the fact that "the Orthodox Church was failing to meet many of the religious needs of the population."^[14]

Historians who have assessed the situation indicate also the declining numbers of Orthodox churches and clergy in proportion to the increasing population. "The population of Russia was increasing, but the number of churches and clergy was not. As a percentage, the church therefore could affect far fewer people. For every Orthodox inhabitant of the empire at the end of the nineteenth century, there were half as many churches, two and a half times fewer monks, and almost a sixth as many monasteries than half a century before."^[15] That is, one person out of a hundred in Russian society was an active and conscious believer before the time of the revolution.^[16]

^[10] Compare to the assessment of early Baptist services in England by Christopher Ellis. Circumstances and a number of prevailing trends influenced the development of Baptist worship. For example, the Puritan worship of the early Baptists found its simplicity refined during the period of persecution between 1660 and 1688. Secret worship inevitably meant that usually only those elements regarded as essential were undertaken. Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering. A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (SCM Press, 2004), p. 32.

^[11] James Stamoulis, *Pravoslavnoe bogoslovie missii segodnia* [Orthodox mission theology today], (Moscow: Pravoslavnyi Svyato-Tikhonovskii Bogoslovskii institut, 2003), p. 253.

^[12] David Hilborn, "[An] Evangelical Perspective on Orthodox Liturgy. The Place of Liturgy in Orthodoxy and Evangelism," in *Baptists and the Orthodox Church. On the way to understanding*, ed. by Ian M. Randall (Prague: An Occa-

sional Publication of IBTS, 2003), p. 64.

^[13] F.M. Dostoevsky, *Dnevnik pisatel'ia* [A writer's diary], 1873, *Collected works in 15 vols., vol. 12* (St. Petersburg, 1992), p. 70.

^[14] Albert W. Wardin, Jr., "How Indigenous Was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire," *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 9, no. 2 (January 2009):32.

^[15] Vladimir Kantor, "Imperskii kontekst russkogo pravoslaviia" [The imperial context of Russian Orthodoxy], *Vtoraia navigatsiia*, 5 (Zaporozh'e: Dikoe pole, 2006), pp. 35-56, 54. (Data from P.N. Miliukov *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul'tury* [Essays on the history of Russian culture, in 3 vols.] Vol. 2, p. 198).

^[16] *Ibid.*, p. 55. Many Russian thinkers noted the poor condition of spiritual education. Dostoevsky, for instance, wrote about the "weak, trifling conception of Orthodoxy" (F. M. Dostoevsky, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works in 30 vols.], vol. 122 [Leningrad: 1981], p. 98) and af-

(But at the same time Orthodoxy actively resisted the spiritual enlightenment of the people by evangelicals, applying the most severe measures to preachers of the Bible.)

In the general masses a low spiritual level played its role, but there were other reasons as well,^[17] of which the worship service is of primary interest. Evangelicals believed that the basic problem was the Orthodox liturgy itself, which separates ethics and worship, does not impose moral responsibilities, does not contribute to the relationship between life and worship, and does not demand holiness; all emphasis is on outward, ritual piety. Moreover, pagan ideas were introduced into the ceremonies themselves. In everyday life, “koliady,” an ancient pagan festival related to the winter solstice was mixed up with Christmas. Likewise were such superstitions as making the sign of the cross when a black cat crosses in front of you, or the idea of drinking excessively at Easter, and so on.^[18]

Massive conversions to Stundism and Baptism attracted the attention of the authorities who considered the relationship to Orthodoxy an expression of loyalty to the State itself.^[19] Moreover, some Baptists placed too much emphasis on their split from Orthodoxy, which riveted the attention of authorities who identified loyalty to Orthodoxy with loyalty to the state. Therefore laws gave local administrative and police authorities opportunities to appoint “a competent official for attending (“sectarian”) worship and prayer services,” who should see to it that “a) another meeting of another kind would not take place on the pretext of being a worship or prayer service, and b) there would not be any desecration or defamation of the dogmas, rituals, and traditions of the Orthodox Church, nor any profanation of it or the objects of its veneration; nor must there be any invitation to apostasy from Orthodoxy.”^[20] A Circular of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, directed to the Office of the

firmed that new “sects” “...undoubtedly came out of the same ignorance, that is, from the perfect ignorance of their religion” (F. M. Dostoevsky, *Dnevnik pisatel'ia* [A writer's diary], 1873, *Collected works in 15 vol.*, vol. 14 (St. Petersburg: 1992), p. 15. Dostoevsky, however, does not explain how “one's own” religion can be something of which one knows nothing.

^[17] Some authors refer to the material and economic factor; see A. I. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundo-baptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae* [The modern Stundo-Baptist movement in the North-West region], (Vilnius: Russkii pochin, 1910), p. 20; F.M. Dostoevsky, *Dnevnik Pisatel'ia*, vol. 14, p. 13; A. I. Klibanov in M. Y. Lensu and E. S. Prokshina, eds., *Baptism i baptisty*, [Baptism and Baptists] (Minsk: “Nauka i tehnika”, 1969), p. 15. However, taking into consideration the context of severe persecution which the evangelical believers encountered, these arguments can hardly be considered seriously.

^[18] Some Orthodox hierarchs noticed that simple Orthodox people who diligently attended

church could believe “in brownies, and also wood and water goblins.” See Tatiana Nikol'skaia, *Russkii Protestantism i gosudarstvennaia vlast' v 1905-1991 godakh* [Russian Protestantism and state power from 1905-1991], (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009), p. 37. Florovsky argues that a paganized form of Christianity began to be regarded as the Orthodox norm (Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes* [Louisville. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002], p. 132).

^[19] A. I. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundo-baptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 28.

^[20] *Baptist* [The Baptist], No. 6 (March, 1909): 21. See also Tsirkuliar MVD, Departament dukhovnyh del – Gubernatoram, Nachal'nikam oblastei, Gradonachal'nikam ot 4 oktiabria 1910 g. NIAB. F. 295. – Op. 1, d. 8462, l. 9. A problem is that these decisions were seldom actually implemented. A. I. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundo-baptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, p. 29.

Governor of Minsk explained that meetings of sectarians “allowed not only the public vilification of the teachings of the Orthodox Church and its institutions and an open call for the rejection of Orthodoxy, but also blasphemy.”^[21]

It should be noted that in spite of theological differences, the relationships between evangelicals and Orthodox in the Russian-speaking context were (at least initially) not always and not everywhere necessarily characterized by conflict. After the revolution in 1917, some of the clergy from both sides made efforts to join forces in the spiritual and moral renovation of the people.^[22]

Prokhanov in 1922 addressed the Orthodox with a plea to begin a reformation in the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and he published 100,000 copies of “Evangel'skii klich.”^[23] Prokhanov sought contact with such “dissenters” (“renovators”) as the “Living Church,” “Ancient Apostolic Church,” and “Church renovation.”^[24] There were also several cases when preachers from among the Baptists and Evangelical Christians were invited to preach in Orthodox churches.^[25] Martsinkovskii wrote that this communication worked the other way also. An Orthodox archpriest spoke at a Christian musical evening in a Moscow evangelical community, for example, and he concluded his speech with a free, inspired prayer.^[26] Such Christians as Martsinkovskii attempted to reform Orthodoxy from within:

When I was baptized by faith I did not have any intention of leaving Orthodoxy. At that time I believed in the opportunity for evangelical reform from the inside and even considered it necessary for me to stay in its midst in order to testify to the importance of personal revival and conscious acceptance of each responsible member of the Church; therefore I did not leave Orthodoxy formally... But due to my above-mentioned action (baptism in an evangelical church) I ended up outside of that church because it ceased to consider me a member and did not permit me to take part in the sacraments...^[27]

^[21] CSIA. 295. – Op. 1, d. 8462, l. 6. It is possible to interpret what is meant by “blasphemy” in the light of this circular of the Ministry of Justice, 3 April 1900 no. 10 677. According to the Circular, “signs of Baptist crimes... presented the following elements of their worship: a) general singing of specially selected Bible verses and hymns from the liturgical books of the sect, such as “Voices of Faith,” “Spiritual Poems,” “Offerings of Christians,” and others, and b) reading of selected places of Scripture by any member of the congregation, or preaching and interpreting false doctrine in the spirit of the sect, and c) kneeling to pray or the utterance of improvised, inspirational prayers without the use of sign of the cross.” (V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, *Iz mira sektantov* [From the world of sectarians] Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1922), p. 175.

^[22] Observation of the present situation shows that the romantic idea of possible cooperation of evangelicals and the Orthodox are inherent, as in the past, to individual members of the first group, contacting with Orthodoxy at the level of

conferences or educational programs. Ordinary believers, familiar with local Orthodoxy, do not see opportunities for collaboration.

^[23] A.I. Mitskevich, *Istoriia Evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov* [The history of Evangelical Christians-Baptists] (Moscow: Rossiiskii Soiuz EKb, 2007), p. 214, indicates Prokhanov's contacts with different groups of “schismatics,” (“restorationists”): “Living church,” “Ancient first-apostolic church,” “Church of renewal.” Jeff Ellis, Wesley Jones, *Drugaiia Revoliutsiia. Rossiiskoe evangelicheskoe probuzhdenie* [Another revolution. The Russian evangelical revival], p. 163.

^[24] Ludvig Shenderovskii, *Ivan Prokhanov* [Ivan Prokhanov] (Toronto: “Evangel'skaia vera,” 1986), pp. 128-129.

^[25] V.F. Martsinkovskii, *Zapisky veruyushchego* [A believer's notes], (Novosibirsk: “Posokh,” 2006), p. 195.

^[26] *Ibid*, pp. 257-258.

^[27] *Ibid*, p. 218.

In the beginning some peasants in Belarus were evangelical, “yet did not dare to openly declare a final break with Orthodoxy.”^[28] On 24 August 1878 government officials took the following subscription from the Dubovyi log [Oak valley] Baptists in Gomel district: “Although we never avoided the holy sacraments and rites of the Orthodox Church, and as peasants at first considered such ceremonies as external and not essential, in the future we will remain [the church’s] faithful sons forever, sacredly and steadily preserving all of its decisions to the end of our life...” A year later, however, they announced a decisive break from the Orthodox Church, declaring “We are of the Evangelical Faith and we belong to the new Russian Christian fellowship. We do not want to talk about a different faith or visit the church, and we do not intend to execute this subscription.” These peasants “publicly express contempt for icons, call the church a whore, and criticize fasting.”^[29]

The way of collaboration, reforming, or renewing Orthodoxy did not become dominant in building relationships between evangelical and Orthodox churches. Although some Orthodox tried to transform the communities in the spirit of ancient Christian fellowship,^[30] the expected changes (Orthodox reform in the evangelical spirit) did not occur, and evangelical believers concentrated on the development of their own churches. Some took this step only after making sure that it was impossible to remain within Orthodoxy and to remain faithful to the Gospel,^[31] but such a development of events, in any case, was unavoidable: the history, theology and liturgical practice of the churches were too different to unite their efforts in a spiritual revival of the people. And of course, even those who did not actively oppose the dominant religion were accused of being “enemies of the people” by severe actions on the part of the Orthodox, the Church hierarchy, and secular authorities because the “evangelical form of life represented a theological and political threat to Orthodoxy.”^[32]

^[28] Generally speaking, many evangelical believers were slow to officially leave the Orthodox Church and organize new churches; see Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905–1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 16; *Istoriia Evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR* (Moscow: VSEKhB, 1989), p. 59; A. Rozhdestvenskii, *Iuzhnorusskii shtundism*, p. 98.

^[29] CGIA SSSR, f. 1284, op. 220, d. 12, l. 14, 21 ob. (Report of Mogilev Governor to Minister of Interior Affairs). M.Y. Lensu, E.S. Prokshina, eds., *Baptism i Baptisty*, p. 16. The correspondent of the London newspaper *The Times* (J. Hay Colligan, “White Russia – A visitor’s impression,” 7 September 1926) after a trip to Western Belarus in 1926 noticed: “Thousands of farmers turn away from the traditional service of the Russian Orthodox church and hold meetings in an evangelical sense, as in Great Britain and America for the last fifty years. Revival hymns are very popular: having heard the tone of the tuning fork, the whole community unites in pleasant singing. Such services of “believers” (this is what these people are called) are so popular that in one of

the villages where I returned, the parish church was almost empty.” Guy Picarda, *Niabesnae polymia. Pratestantskaia tsarkva i belaruskii natsiyanal'ny ruh na pachaiku 20 stagoddzia* [Heavenly flame. The Protestant Church and the Belarusian nationalist movement in the early 20th century] (Minsk: Knigazbor, 2006):12-44, p. 15.

^[30] V. F. Martsinkovskii, *Zapisky veruiushego*, p. 263.

^[31] M. M. Cherenkov, *Evropeis'ka reformaciia ta ukrain'sky evangel'sky Protestantism: Genetiko-tipologichna sporidnenist' i natsional'no-identifikatsiiny vymiry suchasnosti* [The European Reformation and Ukrainian Protestantism: Genetic and typological relations and national identity measurements of modernity], (Odesa: Khristiian'ska prosvita, 2008), p. 300. Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929*, p. 16.

^[32] Andrei Puzynin, *Traditsiia evangel'skikh khristian. Izuchenie samoidentifikatsii i bogosloviia ot momenta ee zarozhdeniia do nashikh dnei* [The tradition of Evangelical Christians. A study of identity and theology from its inception to the present day], p. 84.

Worship in evangelical and Orthodox churches: A refusal of ritual

Returning to the worship service practice of evangelical churches, the radical simplification of liturgy and the rejection of rituals was primarily due to a reaction to Orthodoxy^[33] rather than influence from the West.^[34] One can speak of the “negative identity” of evangelical believers.^[35] Yet it is impossible to set aside the positive element: a serious desire to construct life according to the Gospel, a striving to return to the sources.

However, the disjunction between worship and life, the “ritual belief,” to which most of the Orthodox tended, seriously worried evangelical believers indeed.^[36]

The tragedy of popular Orthodoxy from the point of view of Evangelical Christian-Baptists is that, in essence, Orthodox religion gets its expression only through worship, which Geoffrey Wainwright calls “liturgical escapism.”^[37] Evangelicals believed that the magnificence of the liturgy, the enigmatic beauty of the Church Slavonic language, the heavenly music, gorgeous sanctuary decorations, and luxurious priestly garments become obstacles to knowing God; aesthetic or mystical experience replaces a truly spiritual relationship with the Heavenly Father. The liturgical practice of the Russian Orthodox Church with its sign of the cross, use of candles, prayers for the dead, veneration and worship of icons give nothing to the soul of a human being, they do not change it, they do not bring it closer to the Creator, they do not allow one to have fellowship with God and therefore they are not necessary. One of the first evangelical Christians in St. Petersburg, describing the situation in the Orthodox Church at the end of the nineteenth century, wrote about the pomp and luxury of worship, and complained that instead of making it easier for a person to understand the great truths of God, the rites and priestly garments made it even harder.^[38]

^[33] A Belarusian researcher comments on the “anti-Orthodox orientation of doctrinal and cultic principles of these backgrounds” (early and modern forms of Protestantism); I. F. Rekuts, *Protestantizm i hudozhestvennaya kul'tura Belarusi* [Protestantism and Belarusian artistic culture], (Minsk: BGU, 1995), p. 3.

^[34] It is interesting to note that numerous European evangelical believers are distinguished by a positive and often enthusiastic relationship to the Orthodox rites and liturgy.

^[35] Describing the history of the evangelical movement in Estonia, Toivo Pilli speaks about the “negative identity” of evangelical believers, who emphasized their difference from Lutheranism and Orthodoxy; Toivo Pilli, *Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991* (University of Wales, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague 2007), p. 139. Wainwright affirms: “On the other hand, the origin of Protestantism lies in the sharp confrontation with existing liturgy and doctrines, and the innate Protestant desire for purity of

worship and faith lies in the following expression: *ecclesia semper reformed* (the church is always being renewed)”; Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology, The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (London: Epworth Press, 1980), p. 253. He is echoed by Graham Hugh: “Perhaps the main distinctive sign is that fact that such a movement was opposed to the existing order of things”; Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning. A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 235.

^[36] A contemporary researcher of the religious situation in Southern Belarus considers that the situation is getting worse, and that Orthodoxy is mostly evolving in the direction of “belief in rituals”; T. I. Predko, *Dynamics of Syncretic Religion in Belarusian Polesye* (M.Phil. Dissertation Summary [Minsk, BSU, 2009], p. 3.

^[37] Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 407.

^[38] S. P. Liven, *Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie v Rossii. Vospominaniya kniazheny S. P. Liven* [Spiritual revival in Russia. Memories of Princess S. P. Lieven], (Chicago: SGP, 1989), p. 21.

Prokhanov, analyzing the situation in Russia at the turn of nineteenth-twentieth centuries, made similar criticisms:

[T]he church appeared to be flourishing. There were luxurious temples with golden domes. The worship service was held in the midst of splendid golden glitter, silver, precious stones and decorations, and expensive priestly garments. Externally it all looked admirable but what was the internal condition of the heart? The service consisted mostly of ritual liturgy and there was almost no room for edification and preaching. The people did not know the Word of God.^[39]

In the opinion of evangelicals, a large number of complex rituals, prescribed forms of worship, the use of ancient incomprehensible language contributed to formal participation in the service. In the same spirit says the Romanian Orthodox theologian Ion Bria, “If the language and vocabulary make the text impossible to understand, the people are bound to ignore it. This inevitably breaks any connection between the liturgy and the liturgy after the liturgy.”^[40] The necessary balance between the content of the faith and its external religious demonstration” is not preserved.^[41]

Solving the problem of discontinuity between worship and life, evangelical Christians firmly rejected the liturgical practices of the Orthodox Church, as well as other liturgical and doctrinal issues in an attempt to bridge the gap between worship and life. An accusation against evangelical peasants in Dubovy Log village in Gomel uезд were typical: “Ivan Ivanov, Alexander Andreev, Zakhar Grigoriev, Semion Fedorov and their families have stopped performing Orthodox rites, they do not come to church, do not keep the fast, and they do not honor saints ... these peasants try to spread the above-mentioned doctrine in their village.”^[42] J. Ellis says, “the trappings of Orthodoxy such as the worship of the Virgin Mary, prayers to saints and prayers for the dead, devotion to icons and relics, and the doctrine of salvation by good works were becoming less and less acceptable with increasing knowledge of the Bible.”^[43]

Special attention should be given to the rejection of icons and worshipping them, along with the removal of the breast cross, which became a distinctive characteristic of new converts and which remains one of the key issues dividing the Baptists and the Orthodox. It is not surprising that Orthodox priests ordered people not to associate with “apostates who reject the Lord’s cross and holy icons.”^[44] According to some accusations, the “sectarians” dared to take down icons down and to be disrespectful to them. Sometimes icons were thrown out or even destroyed.^[45] An “anti-Orthodox” poem

^[39] I. S. Prokhanov, *V kotle Rossii, avtobiografiia* [In the cauldron of Russia: An autobiography] (Chicago: World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christian, 1992), p. 20.

^[40] Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from and Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC, 1996), p. 23.

^[41] Alexandr Borisov, *Poblevshie nivy* [Whitened fields]. *Razmyshleniia o Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* [Reflections on the Russian Orthodox Church] (Moscow: “Put’,” 1994), p. 100.

^[42] CGIA SSSR, f. 1284, op. 220, d. 12, l. 1, 1 ob. (Report of Mogilev Governor to Minister of

Interior Affairs). M.Y. Lensu, E.S. Prokshina, edit., *Baptism i Baptisty*, (Sociological essay). Minsk: “Nauka i tehnika,” 1969), p. 17

^[43] Jeff Ellis, Wesley Jones, *Drugaiia revoliutsiia. Rossiiskoe evangelicheskoe probuzhdenie* [Another revolution: Russian evangelical revival], p. 125.

^[44] S. Akinchits, “120-letie Dzekuts’-Maleya” [“120th Dzekuts-Maley Anniversary”], *Krinitsa zhittsya* [The Source of Life], no. 6 (2008):14-16, p. 14.

^[45] See examples of extreme disrespect of icons, especially among Stundists. S. Margaritov, *Istoriia russkikh misticheskikh i racionalisticheskikh sekt*

in the twentieth century expresses the relation of Baptists in Belarus towards icons:

My God is no icon with smouldering incense,
Old women in churches can worship such gods.
For God is no image, so still, unconvincing,
Unable to wake people's hearts.

This image can hear no cries of the hopeless
Because it was painted by hand
I see someone leaning on it, weak and forceless,
In hope that their struggles will end.

But this is an image, so still and unmoving,
It hears no entreaties or prayers of men
You leave unallayed and with no consolation
And plunge into worries again.^[46]

The main reason for the rejection of worshipping icons was zeal to fulfill the commandment to worship the One God and avoid idolatry. Baptists were not persuaded by claims that icons were “theology in painting” and that icons are not worshipped but are objects only for veneration.^[47] Moreover, many ordinary Orthodox do not distinguish a difference between veneration and worship. Baptists proceed from the actual attitudes of their Orthodox neighbors who direct prayers to icons, kiss them, bow in front of them, and expect healings and answers to their prayers. In fact, they consider icons to be a source of blessing and they are treated as most holy objects. People are eager and willing to wait hours in line in order to touch an icon from a distant monastery or church. Such an attitude to material objects allows the comparison of icons to ancient idols and it is not surprising that there is no room for an icon cult in evangelical churches and homes.

Assessing and comparing the internal appearance of prayer houses and churches, one can generally talk about the radical difference in liturgical space, the emphasized anti-sacramentalism of the premises where evangelicals gather for prayer. In Baptist prayer houses, Bible verses, flowers, spotlights or chandeliers, Christmas candles, an elevated state, pews, microphones, musical instruments, and participants' clothing (choir members' robes) fulfill edifying, aesthetic or functional roles, which everyone can be understood without explanation because those items perform the same function in everyday, secular life. The presence of any interior details is often due to the personal tastes of some church members and the desire to create comfort. But candles, icons, holy vessels, devotional articles, sacred garments and their colors, the structure of the sanctuary, and even the location of an Orthodox Church are filled with deep

[History of Russian mystic and rationalistic sects], 4th edit., corrected and supplemented, (Simferopol': Tavrich. gub. tip., 1914), p. 183; Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskoy Soyuz* [Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union], p. 526; A. Rozhdestvenskii, *Iuzhnorusskii shtundizm*, p. 186.

^[46] “Moi Bog,” [My God] 1-3 verses, in *Poems*,

Declamations, Stories (Manuscript, Lipniki, 1960-e).

^[47] “Many Orthodox lack the theological sophistication to distinguish intercession from mediation or veneration from worship,” Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes* (Louisville. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 135.

theological content and symbolism. These have deep meaning and significance, and even differ from each other on the level of the sacredness, which make them impossible to understand without thorough explanation.

Significant changes have taken place in the composition of direct participants in the worship service. The clear-cut division between the priesthood and the laity and the idea of having an intermediary between God and the people, have been set aside. The priesthood of all believers (and the concept of the presence of gifts among all believers) assumes that all Christians ought to take part in the worship service. This requirement is met in the attention given to congregational singing, the use of musical instruments, and such elements as testimonies, declamations and participation in prayer of all who volunteer.^[48]

Assuming that the Orthodox liturgy leaves no room for instruction and believes that preaching even obscures the meaning of the Word of God, evangelicals put forward the preaching of the Gospel rather than liturgy, “plenty of instruction by the Word of God,” which meant a radical shift to a verbal mode of communication because the meetings of the first Christians were not based on religious rituals. “Christians gathered in the true sense of the word around the Word of God.”^[49] Special attention is paid to edification which helps apply truth in life and associate worship with behavior. Even the symbols that decorate the prayer house (an open Bible, cross, grapevine, cup, and candlestick) serve as an additional means of transmitting biblical truth.^[50]

Rituals (which are “an obstacle on the way to the knowledge of God”) give way to “personal” communication with God, and this opportunity is provided by extempore prayer; the negative attitude towards prescribed Orthodox prayers is explained by the Baptist emphasis on prayer as a simple, sincere, conversation with God “from the heart.” This practice is a distinctive of evangelical churches.^[51] Here, sincerity, authenticity, simple-heartedness, and even *narveti* are far more important than form.^[52]

The changes, conditioned by negative attitudes to Orthodox forms, were truly dramatic.^[53] Sometimes people use terms such as “reformation” and “modification” to

^[48] Unfortunately, it is often in such cases that the social character of the service comes into conflict with the individual aspect; the use of some “gifts” does not edify, but weakens the spirit of the listeners.

^[49] K. V. Somov, “O propovedi i propovednikakh” [About preaching and preachers], *Bratskii vestnik* [Fraternal messenger], No. 2 (1964): 33.

^[50] In their homes, some evangelicals replaced icons with verses from the Bible. For example, in the homes of some older evangelicals, in the “red corner,” i.e. the corner of the sitting room opposite the entryway and between the windows, where there would be a cross and/or an icon in an Orthodox household, an evangelical home would have a painted or embroidered verse from the Bible, such as, “God is Spirit and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

^[51] Some churches (especially new ones) include

pre-written prayers in the worship service (it can be the pastor’s prayer or a prayer of any of the saints of past times), but in a traditional service, written prayers have no place, despite all the problems that are associated with improvised prayers.

^[52] Rejection of ritualism and simplicity of worship, however, affected not only the form but the content as well; thus “simplicity” may lead to primitivism. In the absence of a particular form, the content of the services to a large extent depends on the charisma, knowledge and experience of the leader. If the leader lacks these qualities, worship can be a very sad spectacle from both the aesthetic and theological point of view.

^[53] Concerning this, one Soviet researcher, comparing a Baptist service with Orthodox and Catholic ones, observed: “Baptism worked hard on the “cleanup” of religion in the direction of its adaptation to the masses by simplifying and reducing the rites,” in order to “bribe” believers with

describe this process, but they do not reflect the depth of conflict and rejection of Orthodox worship practice; in any case, these terms are wrong in essence because evangelical Christians were not aspiring to reformation, modification, or improvement of Orthodox liturgy; rather, they were returning to the origins, to New Testament church practice as they understood it. Corrections and modernizations seemed inappropriate: “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved” (Matt. 9:16-17). “New” garments and “new” bottles are needed for “new” movement; “old bottles” which interfere with spiritual life and freedom of fellowship with God should be forsaken.

Worship in evangelical and Orthodox churches: The connection

But life and ministry in the Orthodox environment has left its mark on Baptist worship. It is expressed not only in the spirit or atmosphere of the worship service but in its content and form. Baptists use the Synodal translation of the Bible, which is enriched with Orthodox vocabulary.^[54] Worship services that are dedicated to events of the life of Christ could be mentioned, such as the Lord’s appearance in the temple, Annunciation Day, the Transfiguration,^[55] the celebration of Christmas and Easter according to the Orthodox calendar,^[56] the nighttime Easter service (a practice that is disappearing),^[57] and singing an ancient Easter hymn (the troparion) on Easter Sunday itself and forty days after it, and others.^[58]

its “democracy,” and “accessibility.” (A. V. Belov, *Sekty, sektantstvo, sektanty* [Sects, sectarianism, and sectarians], (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), p. 8. Actually, speaking about the “simplification of the Baptist cult,” atheists always emphasized the importance of rites (worship) in Baptist churches in terms of drawing new people to church.

^[54] There are many words adapted from the Orthodox lexicon in the Synodal translation, for example: priest, hypostasis, censer, ark, labdanum, icon lamp, mantle, solemn assembly, saint, communion, chasuble, sacrament, and others.

^[55] Baptists celebrate (but do not conduct any special rituals) only those holidays that directly point to Christ. One of the holidays (the Annunciation) gives attention to Mary, but she is not introduced as our defender, patroness, or the Mother of God, but as a good example of humility and obedience to God’s will. The Russian title of the holiday—Annunciation—indicates that the main idea here concerns the good, joyful news of the birth of the Savior of the world.

^[56] In recent years the situation has been chang-

ing. Churches have shifted to celebrating Christmas together with Western churches, but taking into account the context, they continue to celebrate (for the second time) Christmas with Orthodox world, using these holidays for evangelism.

^[57] In fact, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the practice of holding all-night services has virtually become a thing of the past, but churches especially in villages used to practice it and the author himself took part as a child in Easter services that started at 10 p.m. and ended at 4 or 5 a.m. Preachers usually spoke about the sufferings of Christ until midnight; after midnight, however, the same preachers announced His resurrection.

^[58] “Troparion” is the main festival hymn, which highlights the most important points of the Church’s teaching about the holiday. The Paschal Troparion, sung three times at the beginning and three times at the conclusion of the meeting, is as follows: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the tombs He gave life.”

The content of a traditional Baptist worship service often carries the imprint of Orthodox theology. Emphasis on good works and their importance in salvation, grief and weeping over sin, a humble appeal to God's mercy and an awareness of one's own sinfulness and unworthiness in the sight of God remind one of the well-known Orthodox motif, expressed in the prayer song, "Lord, have mercy" (*Kurie eleison*). Singing, by the way, is one of the bridges leading to the penetration of Orthodox theology and worship character into ECB communities. As far back as in the 1860s, some evangelical Christians who had split off from Orthodoxy continued to sing Orthodox songs before their own songs were written.^[59]

Examination of the present repertoire of the first choir of the ECB Gospel Light church in Minsk^[60] reveals that a third of hymns that are regularly sung in worship are the work of Orthodox authors.^[61] The Baptist style of performance, however, tends to be more classical; it is lively compared to the style of singing the same hymns in an Orthodox church.

Through Orthodox origins and surroundings (perhaps in combination with national characteristics), it is possible to explain the uniformity, restraint, reverence^[62] in prayer, and the respect shown for the worship location evident in a traditional evangelical worship meeting.^[63] In particular, kneeling during prayer is practiced in traditional worship services, although in recent times people may stand during the service. Praying while seated during a traditional meeting is excluded. In the consciousness of many believers the church building has the status of "God's House," and in prayer they express thanks that they "were able to come to 'Your Temple.'"^[64]

Thus, even a general comparison of worship services in Orthodox and Baptist churches on the one hand testifies that Baptists in Belarus continue to demonstrate some aspects of the pre-Baptist context. On the other hand, the study shows a conscious and decisive rejection of liturgical practice, ceremonies, and such related external attributes of worship as icons, candles, special garments, and others. All the above mentioned proves the importance of Orthodox influence in the formation of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist worship service.

^[59] L. I. Kharlov, "Iz istorii muzikal'no-pevcheskogo sluzheniia nashogo bratstva" [From the history of music and the singing ministry of our Brotherhood], *Bratskii vestnik*, No. 6 (1981): 46.

^[60] At the beginning of 2008.

^[61] Of course, the work of such gifted composers as D. S. Bortnianskii, A. A. Archangel, or P. G. Chesnokov is beyond the scope of any one denomination.

^[62] From the very beginning and until the end, the worship service should proceed reverently and decently. There should be no loud talk before the service, and after it is finished everyone should quietly and sedately go out, carrying the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit in their hearts; see I. Motorin, "O bogoslužhenii v dni apostolov i v nashi dni" [About worship in the days of the

Apostles and in our day], *Bratskii Vestnik*, No. 1 (1957): 9.

^[63] Albert W. Wardin, Jr., "How Indigenous Was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire?" *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 9, No. 2 (January 2009):36.

^[64] At an evangelistic meeting in a church in Soligorsk (10.10.2009) the preacher, using Orthodox vocabulary called sinners "to come to the altar." There was no altar (or table for the Lord's Supper) in front; the possible place of the altar was taken by acoustic systems and microphones for the musicians participating in the service, but a call "to come to the altar" in an Orthodox context, without doubt, sounded stronger than a call "to come to the stage."

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