

# Traditional Worship as a Tool for Evangelism

Leonid MIKHOVICH, *Minsk, Belarus*

© L.I. Mikhovich, 2011

## 1. The role of evangelism in Baptist ministry in its historical and religious context

Two important aspects of traditional worship in Russian-speaking Baptist churches are the edifying and evangelistic aspects. Believers are to admonish one another and, at the same time, call unbelievers to repentance. In dialogue with the historical and religious context we will define the place of evangelism in Baptist identity, trace the origin of Baptist missionary activity, explore worship components from an evangelistic perspective, and discuss theological and practical problems created by this style of worship both for mission and for worship itself.

Let us begin with the statement that the concepts of evangelism and evangelicals are inseparable. According to M. Cherenkov, mission, together with personal godliness and conservative theology, is the main characteristic of evangelicals.<sup>[1]</sup> Since the beginning of the movement in the Russian Empire, evangelicals spread the Good News during times of persecution and (relative) freedom, in public and in secret, in large assemblies and privately, and the whole community was involved in evangelism. Baptists viewed themselves as “pioneers of the modern international missionary movement.”<sup>[2]</sup> Every Baptist considered spreading the Good News their sacred duty (the principle of priesthood of all believers allowed every believer to be a witness, an evangelist, or a preacher), and their songs expressed a desire to win at least one “lost soul” for the Lord:

<sup>[1]</sup> M. M. Cherenkov, *Evropeis'ka reformatsiya ta ukrains'kiy evangel's'kiy protestantizm: Genetiko-typologichna sporidnenist' i natsional'no-identifikatsiyini vymiry suchasnosti* (Odessa: Hrystiyanska prosvita, 2008), 64.

<sup>[2]</sup> Ia. Ia. Vins, *Nashi baptistskie printsipy*. 1924, Cl. 5. <http://rusbaptist.stunda.org/vins2.html>. 22.03.11.



**Leonid Mikhovich** (born 1966) received a Master of Theology degree from Moscow Theological Seminary in 1997 and a Master of Arts in Practical Ministry from TCM International Institute (Austria) in 2005. Currently he is working on his doctoral dissertation (IBTS, Prague-University of Wales). His research topic has to do with a study of traditional worship in Russian-speaking Baptist churches. Leonid serves as Rector of Minsk Theological Seminary ([www.mbseminary.org](http://www.mbseminary.org)) and Senior Presbyter of the Association of Churches in Minsk and Minsk Oblast. He is married with three children. E-mail: [lmikhovich@tut.by](mailto:lmikhovich@tut.by).

*Must I go, and empty-handed?  
Must I meet my Savior so?  
Not one soul with which to greet—  
Must I empty-handed go?*<sup>[3]</sup>

The message is especially clear in hymns sung during the harvest festival, which reflects on the theme of fruitfulness and saved souls are regarded as the most important fruit:

*Would I bring no fruit at all when I answer  
Jesus' call  
On the day when He invites me to come  
home?  
When He asks about my sheaf, what would  
I have then to give?  
How can I come empty-handed when I go?*

*Filled with thankfulness to Him who  
redeemed my soul from sin,  
I would like to work for Jesus all day long,  
So my Master will receive from my hands  
at least one sheaf  
When He comes again to meet and take me  
home.*<sup>[4]</sup>

Such “involvement in proselytism”<sup>[5]</sup> of every believer triggered a negative response from secular and Eastern Orthodox circles. A Belarusian researcher speaks of “religious expansionism” and “aggressively militant mission.”<sup>[6]</sup> Orthodox writers warn that

“our Orthodox Church is being attacked by a large horde of trained and experienced missionaries,”<sup>[7]</sup> and “Stundobaptists are the most dangerous group, in terms of their missionary organizations.”<sup>[8]</sup>

The booming activity of evangelical Christians conflicted with the Eastern Orthodox understanding of mission. In reality, the Eastern Orthodox Church also considers itself to be a missionary church. But Eastern Orthodox mission is not about preaching “the gospel to all creation,”<sup>[9]</sup> but, first of all, about worship and tradition.<sup>[10]</sup> Not all of mission is contained in liturgy; it is continued in *diakonia*, ministry, public witness<sup>[11]</sup> and presence, by personal example among the non-Orthodox population,<sup>[12]</sup> and by an attempt to influence state structures, the educational system, culture and society in the Orthodox community. Nevertheless, liturgy remains at the heart of mission: “a community of worshippers becomes an evangelizing community.”<sup>[13]</sup> In terms of mission outside the church, the Orthodox Church was more involved in *counter mission*, which, at an early stage of the evangelical movement (late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries), included both “preventive” (special meetings and talks by church leaders, with Scripture reading, preaching, congrega-

<sup>[3]</sup> *Pesn' vrozozhdeniia*, 657. First stanza.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Pesn' vrozozhdeniia*, 744. Stanzas 1 and 3.

<sup>[5]</sup> J.-P. Villem, *Evropa ta religii. Stavki XXI stolittia* (Kyiv: Duh i litera, 2006), 228; M. M. Cherenkov, *Evropeis'ka reformatsiia ta ukrains'kiy evangel's'kiy protestantizm: Genetiko-typologichna sporidnenist' i natsional'no-identifikatsiyni vymiry suchasnosti*, 62.

<sup>[6]</sup> I. F. Rekuts, *Protestantizm i hudozhestvennaya kul'tura Belarusi* (Minsk: BGU, 1995), 3.

<sup>[7]</sup> N. Bortkovskiy, *Shtundobaptizm*, 117. M. A. Kal'nev, ed. and pub., *Russkiye sektanty, ih uchenie, kul't i sposoby propogandy* (Odessa: Y. I. Fesenko's printing office), 117.

<sup>[8]</sup> *Mogiliovskie eparhial'nye vedomosti*, 1910 (1), 341.

<sup>[9]</sup> Mark 16:15.

<sup>[10]</sup> Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC, 1996), 27.

<sup>[11]</sup> Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, 28.

<sup>[12]</sup> Iakov Stamulis, *Pravoslavnoe bogoslovie missii segodnia*, 189.

<sup>[13]</sup> Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, 24. Evaluating this understanding, Schmemmann insisted on a theological clarification, asking if a church can be called truly mission-oriented when its life is centered almost exclusively on worship and sacraments and its spirituality is mostly mystical and has an ascetic coloring. *Missionerskiy imperativ*. I. Stamulis, *Pravoslavnoe bogoslovie missii segodnia*, 385-396, 387.

tional singing, prayer and other components, in parishes infected with the teaching of the above-mentioned sects, as a counter measure to sectarian prayer meetings<sup>[14]</sup>; publishing books against sectarians; raising the level of church discipline, etc.), and “strong,” or “radical,” measures (banishment, imprisonment and exile of missionaries, as well as deprivation of rights).<sup>[15]</sup>

The need for evangelism, as Baptists understood it, was disputed by the Orthodox Church merely because denomination was equated with nationality, and the majority of Belarusians (as well as Russians and Ukrainians) were considered to be Eastern Orthodox by birth (a new application of the principle *cuius region, eius religio*). In regard to restricting the activity of evangelical Christians, they were acting upon the proposition that “there are no Russian Baptists and they should not exist as such.”<sup>[16]</sup> “Unauthorized conversion from Orthodoxy to any other denomination” was declared “a forbidden and even criminal act.”<sup>[17]</sup>

Baptist evangelistic zeal became a major concern for the government, which regarded the rapid growth of “sectarianism”

a serious threat to the state. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in particular, people were severely persecuted and punished for leaving the Orthodox Church and spreading “heretical and sectarian” doctrines. In doing this, the authorities were trying to make the life of sectarians in Russia unbearable.<sup>[18]</sup> Later the Soviet government brought down its punishing sword on all denominations in an attempt to destroy church ministry from outside and from within. The Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults was ordered to “prevent orchestras, choirs and preachers from coming to other houses of prayer,” “take measures in order to put an end to ‘outreach’ among youth and women,” and put a stop to art and music events, etc.<sup>[19]</sup> Senior pastors were responsible for restricting “unhealthy missionary efforts” and limiting the evangelistic potential of worship services.<sup>[20]</sup>

Repressions, seizure of prayer houses, infringement of rights, total control, and criminal prosecution severely limited opportunities for evangelical Christians. But on the other hand, these stringent measures became a catalyst for evangelistic activities and encouraged their spirit; exiles broad-

<sup>[14]</sup> Decree of the Holy Synod, October 15-May 4, 1909, No.130. *Mogiliovskie eparhial'nye vedomosti*, 1910 (21), 331-334.

<sup>[15]</sup> A. I. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, 22. Discussing measures to combat rationalist sectarianism, the 1891 Missionary Congress “placed a primary focus on measures of church and missionary influence on sectarians in a spirit of peace, love and compassion for the enemies of the Church.” At the same time, however, the Congress recognized the importance of “assisting civil authorities” by way of “some restrictive administrative measures.” K. K. Arseniev, *Svoboda sovesti i veroterpimost'* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1905), 153-155. One of the proposals was, basically, directed toward “taking away their children,” *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>[16]</sup> A. I. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae*, 29-30.

<sup>[17]</sup> Decision of the Government No. 10, Sept. 1891. A. I. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae* (Vilnius: Russkiy pochin, 1910), 29-30.

<sup>[18]</sup> L. N. Mitrokhin, *Baptizm: istoriia i sovremennost'* (St. Petersburg: RHGI, 1997), 243-244.

<sup>[19]</sup> *Instruktivnoe pis'mo Soveta po delam religioznykh kul'tov* [Letter of instruction of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults] (April 1957). GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation). Stock R-6991. List 3. File 148. Pages 3-4. <http://www.rusoir.ru/president/works/214/>. 31.03.11.

<sup>[20]</sup> *Instruktivnoe pis'mo starshim presviteram VSEKhB* [Letter of instruction to AUCECB Senior Pastors] p. 1, § 2.3. p. 7, § 3. The letter was adopted by the December 1959 AUCECB Plenum. Perhaps it was inspired by the CARC (Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults). The AUCECB congress (October 15, 1963) abolished the “Letter of Instruction.”

ened the geography of preaching and the blood of martyrs became the seed of new churches.

## 2. Roots of the evangelistic activity of evangelical Christians

A few factors determined Baptist initiative and energy in the matter of evangelism. We will pay more attention to *historic roots* and the *context of persecution*. In this case it is expressed in the *eschatological* sentiments of evangelical Christians, as well as their *personal conversion experiences*.

A missionary spirit is built into the *genetic code of Baptism*,<sup>[21]</sup> together with an understanding of baptism by faith. Russian-speaking Baptists were true representatives of Baptist character<sup>[22]</sup> in their approach to mission and, in a broader sense, of evangelical Protestantism. Ties and contacts with Baptists in England, Germany, and America, famous for their missionary activity, fostered the growth of the missionary movement. Many Belarusians be-

came Christians when they went to the US in search of a living or after they were sent to Germany as prisoners of war. They came back with a passion for mission.<sup>[23]</sup> In addition, some of the re-emigrants went to Moody Bible Institute and other missionary schools. Later they became actively involved in evangelism in the Soviet Union after the 1917 Revolution.<sup>[24]</sup> Although there were few Protestants among the emigrants who came back to Western Belarus in 1921-1923 (0.9 per cent), their return was a critical factor in the development of Protestantism in the 1920-1930s, because Protestant emigrants had a clear purpose in coming back – they came to spread their doctrine.<sup>[25]</sup> Therefore, missionary groups in England, American revivalism, and the fruit of Onken's missionary activity in Germany and other countries contributed to the growth of evangelism in Belarus.

It is also possible to speak about specific influences, such as the financial support by Western Christians,<sup>[26]</sup> enabling

<sup>[21]</sup> Speaking of Baptist roots, it should be noted that, owing to interconnected historical links, various traditions and cultures, as well as local and Western influences, evangelicals went through a complex self-identification process. Some churches and groups at first did not identify themselves with the Baptist movement, as evidenced, among other factors, by the variety of names given by the government and their own names (this is particularly true with regard to the movement that began in St. Petersburg): "Stundists," "evangelical Christians," "Pashkovtsy" (followers of Pashkov), "Stundo-baptists," "Stundo-Pashkovtsy," "Radstockists," "Kargelevtsy" (followers of Kargel), "Brothers," "Brothers of the Evangelical Confession," "Bible Christians," "Christians baptized in the evangelical faith," "evangelicals," "Svobodovertsy" (free believers), suggested by Prokhanov, etc. Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soiuze* (Onken-Wuppertal-Kassel, 1978), 29, 35, 58, 125, 426, 533.

<sup>[22]</sup> Periods of absence of evangelistic activity, for example, among Baptists in the West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be useful in evaluating the fading of the missionary spirit in the Russian-speaking Baptist movement at the beginning

of the twenty-first century (see Robert G. Torbet, Albert W. Wardin, Sergei Savinsky, *Istoriia baptizma*, Collection, Ed. 1 (Odessa: Bogomyслиe, 1996), 83.

<sup>[23]</sup> According to V. Martsinkovskiy, a well-known statesman and religious leader of the time, about 2,000 people like this came to Russia from exile. *Zapiski veruiushchego* (Novosibirsk: Posokh, 2006), 195.

<sup>[24]</sup> Religious education received in America proved useful in establishing the organizational structure of the evangelical movement. The institutionalization process contributed to the success of evangelistic activity.

<sup>[25]</sup> According to the list of evangelical and Baptist pastors made by the Polesie Voivodship Office, sixteen out of forty-two pastors were re-emigrants from the USA and Russia, who came back from their emigration in 1921-1923. T. V. Lisovskaya, *Novye protestantskie denominatsii na zapadnobeloruskikh zemliakh v kontse XIX – 20 gg. XX veka: Faktory i putsi poyavleniya*. Ves'nik Brestskaga universiteta, 2(30), (2007):41-49, 45. (Based on the materials of the State Archive of Brest Oblast (GABO). Stock 1. List 2, File 2345, Pages 1-11).

<sup>[26]</sup> "Contrary to the prevailing idea in Soviet historiography that the Protestant movement in

the advance of missionary activity, or songs translated from English and German, which encouraged people to spread the Good News and were used in evangelism (Prokhanov alone translated 413 hymns). Also, according to Gregory Nichols, the missionary spirit was formed by “the early influences of the Keswick Holiness movement and the Evangelical Alliance on the early leaders of Baptist communities in the Russian-speaking world” and “I. V. Kargel played a key role in the passing of this form of spirituality to the Russian-speaking baptistic communities in such a way that it is still uniquely present in those communities today.”<sup>[27]</sup>

Evangelistic activity was stirred by *eschatological* expectations, looking forward to Christ’s second coming in a short while, to which persecution added a special color.<sup>[28]</sup> “And behold, I am coming quickly” (Rev. 22:7) is one of the most popular passages of Scripture in prayer houses—it was followed by a call to repent and believe in the Gospel (Mark 1:15b). Brevity of time made people place all their life on the altar of Christian witness. Their passion was stirred by the awareness of the inevitable death of unbelievers and their condemnation to eternal bodily torment in hell. That is why each of them tried to do their best to fulfill their duty of saving people, especially family members and neighbors. Christians had no other choice be-

cause they were aware of the exclusiveness of the Bible and salvation in Christ alone. Believers sang with enthusiasm:

*We live to share the Holy Word with others  
Who die in sin, despair and hopelessness.  
Let us equip ourselves and one another  
To serve our Lord in trials and distress.*

*This life is tough and offers little comfort,  
But we are here to labor, not to feast –  
We see this world and so keep pressing  
onward  
To save the lost and bring them love and  
peace.<sup>[29]</sup>*

The most important motive for involvement in preaching the Gospel was *personal conversion experience*, its vividness and power, changes in people’s lives and contrast with their life before conversion. (A transformed life as a result of conversion is a key concept in Baptist tradition. In 1978, the Union of ECB Churches published a hymnal which became especially popular in the Soviet and post-Soviet time, *Pesn’ vozrozhdeniia*, that is “song of rebirth” or revival). Most Belarusian converts were simple people whose lifestyle could not be called grand. A description in a newspaper shows, albeit in an exaggerated way, the customs and morals of the day:

In another village, people calculated the cost of St. Michael’s feast celebrations: “...400 poods of bread were used to make home-distilled vodka. 100 carts of wood,

Western Belarus relied solely on foreign financing, archival sources show that... only in some isolated cases, European institutions provided funds for the maintenance of churches.” T. V. Lisovskaya, *Deyatel’nost’ protestantskikh obshchin i organizatsiy v Zapadnoy Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.* Ves’nik Grodzenskaga dziarzhaunaga universiteta imia Yanki Kupaly, Series 1, 2(67), (2008):77-82, 80.

<sup>[27]</sup> Gregory Nichols, “Evangelical Spirituality and Russian Baptists,” in Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creanga, Brian Brock, eds., *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning*. Prague: IBTS.

(2007): 205-216, 206. This point of view is also shared by Walter Sawatsky, a researcher of the Russian-speaking Baptist movement: Sawatsky, *Evangel’skie khristiane-baptisty v SSSR posle Vtoroy mirovoy voyny* (Moscow: 1995), Chapter 12.

<sup>[28]</sup> Preaching did not stop in times of freedom, either. According to Baptist understanding, first of all, it is God who “opens the door” (Rev. 3:8) for preaching the Gospel. Second, the time of freedom will not last long. It is only a respite before the next crackdown.

<sup>[29]</sup> *Pesn’ vozrozhdeniia*, 792. Stanzas 3 and 5.

an old school, part of a public building and part of a shop were burnt. Nineteen heads were smashed; eight people were wounded, including six stabbed and two hit with an axe. Seven eyes were plucked out and three arms were twisted. People who took part in fights and festive riots included teenagers, youth and members of the village Soviet and the Volispolkom.”<sup>[30]</sup>

Evangelical Christians saw the Good News as a power that can transform lives, and their personal experience pushed them to lead others to salvation. Most Christians had no contacts with Western believers and had only a vague idea of Baptist principles. They were inspired by the Gospel and used it as “a weapon.” They understood the Great Commission as their personal duty. As “New Testament Christians,” they preached salvation, following the model of early Christian churches, because the call to “repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15) “was constantly heard in the worship of the first Christians.”<sup>[31]</sup> The desire of evangelicals to “save the lost,” not just spread their faith, was reflected in their worship. The structure of a regular service is more a reflection of the edification principle, while its spirit is marked by anti-sacramentalism, together with a “distinct revivalist flare,”<sup>[32]</sup> which fades in a new context of prolonged (relative) freedom.

### 3. Evangelism through public worship

The evangelistic focus of Baptist worship and its formation as the key tool for mission was defined, to a considerable extent, by Baptist striving for mission. Thus, the missionary activity of many church mem-

bers involves inviting to church their family, friends, neighbors and all the people they meet, following the example of Luke 14:23. Therefore, evangelism and worship are tightly interwoven and complement each other. In the language of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, worship becomes “both the ‘fountain’ from which the Church’s evangelical power flows and the “peak” to which its ministry is pointed.”<sup>[33]</sup>

Examining the role of worship in mission, it is worth mentioning the tradition of *evangelistic (invitation) services*, which, in turn, can be further divided into specialized meetings held in certain places at a certain time, and meetings in place of regular worship services. In the first case, meetings “went out” into the world. Quite often meetings were held outside church buildings for evangelistic purposes—in the street, on the church grounds, in parks, clubs and stadiums, as well as in public transportation, if there was an opportunity to do so (it primarily depended on the degree of religious freedom). One of the accusations pressed against Iosif Bondarenko, an evangelist of the Council of Churches, who spent a total of nine years in prison between 1962 and 1981, was formulated as follows:

Believers gathered together in large groups in the woods near the city and in public places of summer recreation. Led by the defendants, they put up banners with Bible passages, engaged in loud readings and choir singing of hymns accompanied by an orchestra. They were involved in similar activities at railway stations and in electric train carriages.<sup>[34]</sup>

<sup>[30]</sup> *Nasha derevnia*, 1-1927.

<sup>[31]</sup> K. V. Somov, “Tserkov’ Khrista i ego sviashchenstvo,” *Bratskiy vestnik*, 4 (1963): 53-65, p. 54.

<sup>[32]</sup> Gregory Nichols, “Evangelical Spirituality and

Russian Baptists,” 206.

<sup>[33]</sup> Paul Waitman Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 28.

<sup>[34]</sup> I. Bondarenko, *Tri prigovora* (Odessa, 2006), 174.

Funerals and weddings were turned into occasions for evangelism. Christians were accused of “turning their funeral processions into evangelistic prayer meetings used as a tool of propaganda.” They choose “the most crowded places” for their route on purpose, “often pause on their way in prominent places, read the Gospels and accompany it with speeches called sermons, in which they expose their sectarian doctrine.” All the way they “sing the same Christian songs they sing at their prayer meetings.”<sup>[35]</sup>

Special meetings in prayer houses served evangelistic purposes. It was stated in the MIA Circular: “Under the guise of worship and prayer meetings, sectarians have public meetings for fellowship, reading and discussion of religious topics, which do not function as worship services or devotional meetings.”<sup>[36]</sup> One of the best examples are the worship services in Vitebsk, described by Soviet authors:

In Vitebsk, evangelicals and Baptists organize evenings, which they call “literary soirees.” Their typical program looks like this: individual and collective recitals of religious poetry, solo, choir and group singing, and speeches by pastors and some sectarians, etc. These sects make use

of other forms and methods of propaganda and agitation, such as religious drama (passion plays), music and choir. They even have a piano in their houses of prayer. Following the orders of their leaders, sectarians invite youth and adults to these evenings.<sup>[37]</sup>

“Evangelistic” meetings are different from regular ones, not just because of their special focus, but also because of better preparation, orderliness, selective participation, intensity of music ministry and structure (more music, less preaching and prayer; testimonies).

But we will give attention to a “*regular*” *meeting* which has evangelistic elements and is conducted *in an evangelistic spirit*. There are churches in which all services, to a greater or lesser extent, target unbelievers. (Particularly during Perestroika, almost every worship service ended with a call to repentance.)

An analysis of components of public worship shows that all of them, from worship space to a call to repentance, can fulfill an *evangelistic purpose*.<sup>[38]</sup> The walls of prayer houses become the first tool—they are decorated with Scriptures announcing the closeness and inevitability of the Second Coming (Rev 22:12; Mark

<sup>[35]</sup> TsGIA (Central State Historical Archives), Kiev, Stock 127, List 1074, File 922, Pages 5,6. (Letter of Metropolitan Flavian, January 2, 1914; Kiev Diocese). This practice continued in Soviet times and it is also sometimes observed today. For instance, on March 12, 2011, the author was informed that in the village of Lipniki, Drahichyn District, Brest Oblast, evangelicals organized a solemn funeral procession for one of the local people. They passed through the village with singing and music and preached in the backyard of a private house and at the cemetery.

<sup>[36]</sup> Office of the Governor of Minsk. Table 4. Information provided by Adventists and Baptists in the Minsk province (July 10, 1913–November 11, 1914). Ministry of Internal Affairs Circular, Department of Religious Affairs – province governors, area governors and city administrators. TsGIA, Stock

295. List 1, File 8462, Page 6. Bortkovskiy observed in 1911, “Do we need to say how strong and lasting is the impression produced on the souls of visitors by such holidays with prayer, kneeling, choral singing and inspirational preaching?” N. Bortkovskiy, *Shtundobaptizm*, 116.

<sup>[37]</sup> D. Khaïtun, P. Kapaevich, *Suchasnae sektantstva na Belarusi* (Minsk: Belarusian State Publishing House, 1929), 44.

<sup>[38]</sup> From an evangelistic perspective, church buildings and the areas around houses of prayer need to make some changes. Some prayer house courtyards and fences, especially in the country, are untended and unattractive. Because of historical reasons, some houses are difficult to find and even some modern buildings are difficult to enter, especially for people with physical impairments.

1:15), which requires repentance (Mark 1:15b).<sup>[39]</sup> These passages warn that the time to repent is today (Hos 10:12). They speak about God's love, Christ's death, and faith, through which salvation is made possible (1 John 4:8; John 3:16; Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 15:3a).<sup>[40]</sup>

Evangelistic elements are clearly expressed in *prayer*, primarily in its supplication. Surveys show that church members quite often ask in prayer that their family, relatives or neighbors would repent and be saved. Prayer often turns into a specific request to God to free a husband or a son from sin, especially alcohol addiction because it is one of the common problems among Belarusians.<sup>[41]</sup> The form and content of prayer become evangelistic in themselves—the spontaneity of prayer can have a special impact on new people, stirring their interest in the evangelical faith and this kind of a direct relationship with God.<sup>[42]</sup>

Congregational *singing* becomes a tool for evangelism. “Call to repentance” is the largest of the thematic sections in *Pesn' vozrozhdeniia*. It includes ninety songs (by comparison, previous sections, such as “About the church” and “Call to work,” contain eleven and thirty-two songs, respectively). Evangelistic aspects are strongly expressed in other sections, particularly

in the largest section, “Youth songs.” Hymns sung before preaching “soften hearts of stone,” so that people may receive the Word of truth. If a sermon is followed by a call to repentance, a “call song” is often sung, which elicits tears of repentance, and while it is sung, penitent sinners are invited to come forward and repent. The most popular “call songs” include, “Will you leave at this hour and reject Jesus' call?”<sup>[43]</sup> “Why are you lingering on your sinful way?”<sup>[44]</sup> “A new and living way to salvation,”<sup>[45]</sup> “The Lord wants to bless all people,”<sup>[46]</sup> etc. Those singing these hymns encourage other people to brush away all doubts and make the most important decision in their life. Along with congregational singing, other kinds of singing also fulfill the purpose of evangelism. “Choral singing is called not only to affect people's feelings, but also make them think, analyze their life, draw conclusions and confess their sins before the Lord.”<sup>[47]</sup> “If choral singing does not affect a listener's deep and secret feelings, but only pleases their ear, it does not fulfill their true purpose and brings no glory to God.”<sup>[48]</sup>

“Their [Baptist] simple, sad and moving melodious songs produce a deep and irresistible impression on people's masses,”<sup>[49]</sup> (we are not speaking of only *evangelistic* hymns), which was acknowledged

<sup>[39]</sup> Q. 2008.

<sup>[40]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[41]</sup> Notes requesting prayer usually concern people's health. Q. 2008.

<sup>[42]</sup> This element (which makes Baptist worship so different from Orthodox liturgy) seems very strange to ordinary Orthodox people and strikes them with its newness and uniqueness. Dzekuts-Maley wrote in one of his memoirs, “Accidental visitors, next-door neighbors, looked at me, at the worship service and our ‘peculiar’ prayers and were very surprised by the new faith. ‘Where did you get this?’ ‘What does this mean?’” Stepan Pekun, *Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts'-Maley: zhizn' i sluzhenie*. (Krynitsa Zhyttsya, March-April, 2000), 8.

<sup>[43]</sup> *Pesn' vozrozhdeniia*, 956.

<sup>[44]</sup> Ibid, 381.

<sup>[45]</sup> Ibid, 295.

<sup>[46]</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>[47]</sup> B. K., “O muzyke i penii,” *Bratskiy Vestnik*, 1, (1977), 69.

<sup>[48]</sup> B. K., “O muzyke i penii,” 68-69.

<sup>[49]</sup> *Mogiliovskie eparhial'nye vedomosti*, 1920 (21), 716.

<sup>[50]</sup> Typical testimonies: “I was walking by the house of prayer and heard singing, so I came in ...” “I heard young people sing in a square. I was so impressed by their songs that I came to their worship service and repented a few months later.”



both by converts themselves <sup>[50]</sup> and their opponents who stressed the value of singing only as an art:

A believer's esthetic feeling of a Christian is given a special direction during public worship; it serves as one of the ways of perceiving religious ideas and images. Esthetic feelings and esthetic perception foster and strengthen religious faith, drawing into the domain of influence of a preacher's ideas. A. M. Gorky stated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Congress of the Union of Militant Atheists (1930), "Undoubtedly, many people convert to a religion for esthetical reasons because churches have good singing."<sup>[51]</sup>

**Testimonies** (typically prominent episodes of life, which show practically the way God works in a believer's life) of church members take up less time in worship. For instance, in one church this happens only once a year, when church members tell each other about their path to God (repentance and conversion) after baptism. In other churches it is done more often, especially at evangelism services.<sup>[52]</sup> The testimony of conversion is the most common kind of testimony and it becomes a powerful tool for attracting sinners through the experience of other sinners who have already been saved. Thus, it shows how the wall between the church and the world can be overcome.

The most important tool of evangelism is **preaching**. As in the Early Church, preaching is an "exposition of Scripture

and exhortation to repentance and a holy life."<sup>[53]</sup> Especially in the past (depending on the worship service), winning souls could be the sole purpose of preaching, and preaching, in turn, became the main tool for bringing people to faith.

Preachers always tried to convince their audience to "be saved from this perverse generation,"<sup>[54]</sup> for there is only eternal death apart from Christ. The bright side of the message was the promise of freedom from sin, comfort for the weary and heavy-laden,<sup>[55]</sup> joy in this life and hope for eternal life with God. Preachers paid special attention to the danger of delay. "The last invitation" is announced,<sup>[56]</sup> "now," "today" is the time to come to Jesus because it may be too late tomorrow—the Grim Reaper may come or Jesus Christ may return. The words of a well-known hymn, which called sinners to repentance, confirm this idea:

*The Sun will cease to give its light one day,  
And darkness comes to sweep all things  
away,*

*When night falls down, the gate will soon be  
closed, And you will hear a cry behind the  
doors:*

*There is no place! No place, the gate is  
closed!*<sup>[57]</sup>

Part of the final sermon can be a **call to repentance**, which can be used as an independent element at the end of worship. It is sometimes (in some churches) followed by a call (invitation) hymn. The preacher (pastor) calls those who want to repent and confess their sins before God and the

<sup>[51]</sup> F. Fedorenko, *Sekty, ih vera i dela*. (Moscow: Political Literature Publishing House, 1965), 340. M. Gorkiy, *O religii* (Moscow: State Anti-Religious Publishing House, 1941), 186. "Singing, especially if it is good, (speaking of Stundists [Baptists], they always sing with emotion), is able to move people's hearts and even win them over." N. Bortkovskiy, *Shtundobaptizm*, 123.

<sup>[52]</sup> Q, 2008. A typical pattern of testimony is this:

"I was a bad person and had no happiness in life. God called me and I repented. After conversion I have had joy and happiness in my life with God."

<sup>[53]</sup> Philipp Shaff, *History of the Christian Church, vol. 1, Apostolic Christianity*, §66.

<sup>[54]</sup> Acts 2:40.

<sup>[55]</sup> Matt 11:28.

<sup>[56]</sup> *Pesn' vozrozhdeniia*, 575.

<sup>[57]</sup> *Ibid*, 298. First stanza.

church to come forward to the pulpit (a prominent place) and say a prayer asking God to forgive their sins. After that a church minister prays and the congregation sings one verse and the chorus of the song, “Sing a joyful song in heaven!//The prodigal son is back forever.”<sup>[58]</sup> (When a woman publicly repents, a different verse is sung, which starts with the words, “The lost sheep has been found...”).<sup>[59]</sup>

Calls to repentance were particularly emotional at the beginning of Perestroika. Repeating the same verse or singing several hymns at the time of the call built up emotion and led people to “public repentance.” Once in a while the preacher repeated the words of the call and the choir or the congregation echoed the call:

*Will you leave at this hour, will you leave at this hour,*

*Will you leave at this hour and reject Jesus' call?*

*Will you leave at this hour?*<sup>[60]</sup>

*Your time is now, your time is now, Jesus' arms are open for you!*

*Your time is now, your time is now, Come before night comes into view.*<sup>[61]</sup>

Such persistence and passion in call was lost by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>[62]</sup> Calls to repentance are made less often (usually at spe-

cial services or during holidays) and they tend to be softer. It is not necessary for people from the audience “to come up front to the pulpit” and say a public prayer. They are only asked to raise their hand or pray silently and then after the meeting come to talk to the ministers.

The weakening of evangelistic motivation and the softening of the call is related not only to a sense of responsibility, a sad experience of hasty emotional decisions and unpreparedness of the audience for repentance, but also the overall fading of a missionary spirit. The evangelistic activity of Baptist churches in general has lost its dynamics due to weariness, indifference, and lack of confidence caused by the decreased effectiveness of evangelism in the twenty-first century and the loss of “sheaves” that had been gained before.<sup>[63]</sup> In addition, apart from ministry to the Lord and public worship, Christians now have other centers of gravity, unavailable or undesirable in times of persecution: interesting jobs, travel, higher education, secular culture, and information technologies. As a result, the focus of public worship is shifted from evangelism to edification, and churches begin to pay more attention to preserving their heritage or fighting for pure doctrine, which does not require as much inspiration and commitment. Calls to repentance in preaching are now replaced by calls to ho-

<sup>[58]</sup> *Pesn' vozrozhdeniia*, 389.

<sup>[59]</sup> Sometimes repentance is made without a call, when a person comes up front during singing or even after the closing pastoral prayer, and says they would like to pray. There are also, as one pastor put it, “arranged repentances.” A person who wants to repent comes to the pastor before worship and tells him that they want to repent and asks the pastor to make a call. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, some preachers began to add to a call to renewal to the call to repentance. It is different from the repeated repentance of those who strayed away or were excommunicated. Renewal of repentance does not involve sin, for which church discipline is applied. It

is just another step on the way of dedication to the Lord. It is a public prayer of repentance of secret sins or character defects. As a result, if there are no unbelievers in the congregation or they do not respond to the call, believers come forward.

<sup>[60]</sup> *Pesn' vozrozhdeniia* - 2500, 956. Chorus.

<sup>[61]</sup> *Pesn' vozrozhdeniia*, 381. Chorus.

<sup>[62]</sup> An intensely emotional call is still typical of Russian emigrant churches in America.

<sup>[63]</sup> Many churches were not ready to accept new people, which required going beyond their subculture. They also had no counseling experience to work with the large number of people who repented.

liness and faithfulness in following the Lord.

The effectiveness of the call in the house of prayer has decreased, and lack of response disappoints the congregation and preachers who simply do not want to take chances again. Moreover, a new generation of preachers with a theological background, which emerged after Perestroika, have no skills related to evangelistic preaching and have been oriented from the outset toward text study and teaching believers.

Besides, the tradition of making a public repentance becomes less and less popular in houses of prayer. Out-of-worship activities have begun to play a more important role in evangelism, such as camps, small groups, and youth conferences.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the changes, public worship remains the main tool for evangelism.<sup>[64]</sup> This is explained by the fact that other methods are not as well-developed, especially those involving going outside the church. Another reason is that the church has many years of experience of using this form of evangelism, so public worship has a strong evangelistic potential, primarily contained in its tradition of preaching and developed music ministry. Moreover, state policy aimed at limiting the activity of evangelical Christians outside prayer houses also leads to the emergence of a centripetal ministry based on activities inside the church building.

<sup>[64]</sup> At least it was so. In the early twentieth century, N. Bortkovskiy pointed out that “about 75 percent of those who strayed away from Orthodoxy to sectarianism would confirm that participation in prayer meetings was the first step on the way ... into the sect,” *Shtundobaptizm*, 124.

<sup>[65]</sup> McKibbens points to such dangers in Baptist worship: “The primary and sometimes sole purpose of preaching became the conversion of sinners, not the praise of God.” “Hymns and spiritual songs became a means for conversion rather than simply a form of corporate praise.” Thomas R. McKibbens, “Our Baptist Heritage in Worship.” *Review and Expositor*, vol. LXXX, No. 1 (Winter, 1983): 53-70, 64, 65.

#### 4. Problems related to an evangelistic focus of public worship

Two of the main problems related to an evangelistic focus of public worship are: ***a simplified understanding of mission*** and ***neglect of other aspects of public worship***, which is conditioned by a pragmatic approach to worship.<sup>[65]</sup>

Attention to proclaiming the Gospel in public worship (along with the legacy of limited opportunities for other ways of ministry during persecution)<sup>[66]</sup> leads to an overemphasis on verbal evangelism or limits evangelism to ***proclamation in public worship***. Although churches put a lot of stress on the incarnational approach, personal godliness and a Christian lifestyle, which should attract unbelievers to the church where they will hear the transforming Word, “the traditional evangelical revivalist approach remains predominant.”<sup>[67]</sup> Social ministry, small group ministry, friendship and personal relationships (to a great extent due to a clear distinction between Christians and non-Christians in Soviet times), all the more so societal transformation, education, mass media and awareness-raising generally remain beyond the attention of the church for a number of reasons.

***An unbalanced approach to worship*** can result from an overemphasis on public

<sup>[66]</sup> According to the Resolution of the RSFSR People’s Commissars’ Council Central Executive Committee, as of 8 April 1929, “On religious associations,” believers were not allowed, among other things: a) to establish mutual aid funds, cooperatives or industrial associations and use any property in their possession for any purpose other than meeting their religious needs; b) to provide financial support for their church members. <http://perchatkin.com/perchatkin/?p=1741>. 11.03.11

<sup>[67]</sup> Toivo Pilli, *Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991* (University of Wales, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague 2007), 210.

worship as an evangelistic tool. When converting new people becomes a primary task for public worship, preachers neglect the essential spiritual needs of Christians. The content of the components is formed according to the level of understanding of seekers. Instead of solid food,<sup>[68]</sup> the audience receives invitations to open up their hearts to Jesus who saves from sin, to trust Him, and to find peace and eternal life in Him. Thus, believers lack a systematic Bible study and answers to important problems of today's life, which hinders their maturity.

***The pursuit of results damages worship.*** Exaggerated attention to non-Christians weakens horizontal ties (Christian-to-Christian), as well as vertical ones (God-Christian); worship remains in the shade of evangelism. Public worship can be impressive and inspirational in regard to having an effect on feelings ("affective worship"),<sup>[69]</sup> but people do not meet God during worship. According to McKibbens' evaluation, a shift from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, from worship as God-centered to worship as person-centered is a result of the impact of revivalism.<sup>[70]</sup> The temptation to measure the effectiveness of

public worship by the number of people won to Christ is related to primary stress on evangelism and it distracts from worship itself; it also leaves people unsatisfied in case there is no result (nobody has responded to a call) and it reduces the meaning of repentance, limiting it to coming up to the pulpit.

Keith Jones has pointed out that, "there is a grave temptation for us to mix up the worship of believers in Spirit in Truth with the pre-evangelism or evangelism of Paul on Mars Hill, rather than the synagogue at Capernaum, or the Basilica in Alexandria."<sup>[71]</sup> So the way to balanced and integral public worship begins with defining purposes of worship and understanding the place of evangelism in community meetings (as well as edification, comfort, inspiration, counseling, etc.). Evangelism remains to be one of the aspects of public worship and not its purpose; it is a natural consequence of the worship of the faithful. The worship meeting is directed to God, and relationships dynamics and dialogue between the Lord and Christians awaken faith in the people present and encourage them to join the dialogue.

## Bibliography

Arseniev, K. K. *Svoboda sovesti i veroterpimost'* [Freedom of conscience and tolerance]. St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaya pol'za, 1905.  
 B. K., "O muzyke i penii" [On music and singing]. *Bratskiy Vestnik*, 1, 1977.  
 Bondarenko, I. *Tri prigovora* [Three verdicts]. Odessa: 2006.  
 Bortkovskiy, N. "Shtundobaptizm" [Stundobaptism]. In *Russkiye sektanty, ih*

*uchenie, kul't i sposoby propogandy* [Russian sectarians: Their teaching, cult and propaganda techniques]. Edited and published by M. A. Kalnev. Odessa: Y. I. Fesenko's printing office, 1911: 117-128.  
 Bria, Ion. *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*. Geneva: WCC, 1996.

<sup>[68]</sup> Heb 5:12.

<sup>[69]</sup> James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine, Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 375.

<sup>[70]</sup> McKibbens, "Our Baptist Heritage in

Worship," 64.

<sup>[71]</sup> Keith G. Jones, "On Abandoning Public Worship." Keith, G. Jones and Parush P. Parushev, ed. *Currents in Baptist Theology of Worship Today* (Praha: IBTS, 2007), 8.

- Brock, Brian, ed. *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning*. Praha: IBTS, 2007.
- Cherenkov, M. M. Evropeis'ka reformatsiya ta ukrains'kiy evangel's'kiy protestantizm: *Genetiko-typologichna sporidnenist' i natsional'no-identifikatsiyni vymiry suchasnosti* [The European Reformation and Ukrainian Evangelical Protestantism: Genetic-typological affinity and modern national identification dimensions]. Odessa: Khrystiyanska prosvita, 2008.
- Fedorenko, F. *Sekty, ih vera i dela* [Sects, their faith and deeds]. Moscow: Political Literature Publishing House, 1965.
- Gorkiy, M. *O religii* [On religion]. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe antireligioznoe izdatel'stvo, 1941.
- Hoon, Paul Waitman. *The Integrity of Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971.
- Instruktivnoe pis'mo Soveta po delam religioznykh kul'tov* [Letter of instruction of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults] 1957, April. GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation). Stock R- 6991. List 3, File 148, Pages 3-4. <http://www.rusoir.ru/president/works/214/>. 31.03.11.
- Instruktivnoe pis'mo starshim presviteram VSEHB* [Letter of instruction to AUCECB Senior Pastors].
- Jones, Keith G. 'On Abandoning Public Worship.' In Keith G. Jones and Parush P. Parushev, eds., *Currents in Baptist Theology of Worship Today*. Prague: IBTS, 2007.
- Kahle, Wilhelm. *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom Soyuze* [Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union]. Onken-Wuppertal-Kassel, 1978.
- Khaitun, D. and P. Kapaevich. *Suchasnae sektantstva na Belarusi* [Modern sectarianism in Belarus]. Minsk: Belarusian State Publishing House, 1929.
- Lisovskaia, T. V. "Novye protestantskie denominatsii na zapadnobelorusskikh zemliakh v kontse XIX – 20 gg. XX veka: Faktory i putsi poyavleniya" [New Protestant denominations in West Belarusian territory between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s: Factors and ways of emergence]. *Ves'nik Brestskago universiteta*, 2(30), 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Deyatel'nost' protestantskikh obshchin i organizatsiy v Zapadnoy Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg. [The activities of Protestant churches in Western Belarus from 1921-1939]. *Ves'nik Grodzenskago dziazhaunaga universiteta imia Yanki Kupaly*, Series 1, 2(67), 2008.
- Martsinkovskiy, V. F. *Zapiski veruyushchego* [A believer's notes]. Novosibirsk: Posokh, 2006.
- McClendon, James Wm. Jr. *Doctrine, Systematic Theology*, vol. 2. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- McKibbens, Thomas R. "Our Baptist Heritage in Worship." *Review and Expositors*, vol. LXXX, No. 1. Winter, 1983.
- Milovidov, A. I. *Sovremennoe shtundobaptistskoe dvizhenie v Severo-Zapadnom krae* [Modern Stundo-Baptist movement in the North-Western region]. Vilnius: Russkiy pochyn, 1910.
- Mitrokhin, L. N. *Baptizm: istoriia i sovremennost'* [The Baptist movement: Past and present]. St. Petersburg: RHGI, 1997.
- Mogiliovskie eparhial'nye vedomosti [Mogilev diocese gazette], 1910.
- Nasha Derevnya* (Our village), 1(27), 1927.
- Nichols, Gregory, *Evangelical Spirituality and Russian Baptists*. Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creanga,
- Odintsov, M. I. *Sovet po delam religioznykh kul'tov pri SM SSSR i evangel'skoe dvizhenie v Sovetskom Soyuze v 1956-1965 gg.* [Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults of the USSR Council of Ministers and the evangelical movement in the USSR, 1956-1965]. <http://www.rusoir.ru/president/works/214/>. 31.03.11.
- Pekun, Stepan. *Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts'-Maley: zhizn' i sluzhenie* [Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts'-Maley: Life and ministry]. Krynitsa Zhyttsya, 2, 2000.
- Pesn' vozrozhdeniya* [Song of revival]. A collection of hymns and songs of evangelical churches. Minsk, 1995.
- Picarda, Guy. Niabesnae polymia. Pratestantskaya tsarkva i belaruskii natsiyanal'ny ruh na *pachatku 20 stagoddzia* [Heavenly flame. The Protestant church and the Belarusian nationalist movement in the early twentieth century]. Minsk: Knigazbor, 2006.

- Pilli, Toivo. *Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia: The Shaping of Identity, 1945-1991*. University of Wales, International Baptist Theological Seminary. Prague, 2007.
- Plett, I. P. *Zarozhdenie tserkvei EKbB* [The origin of ECB churches]. Union of ECB Churches: Khristianin, 1994.
- Rekuts, I. F. *Protestantizm i udozhestvennaya kul'tura Belarusi* [Protestantism and Belarusian artistic culture]. Minsk: BGU, 1995.
- Sawatsky, W. *Evangel'skie khristiane-baptisty v SSSR posle Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Evangelical Christians-Baptists after World War II). Moscow: 1995.
- Schaff, Philipp. *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, Apostolic Christianity, §66. *Slovo istiny* [Word of truth], 1, 1917.
- Somov, K. V. "Tserkov' Khrista i evo sviashchenstvo" [The church of Christ and its priesthood]. *Bratskiy vestnik* [Fraternal bulletin], 4 (1963).
- Stamulis, Iakov. *Pravoslavnoe bogoslovie missii segodnia*. Moscow: St. Tikhon Orthodox Theological Institute, 2003.
- Torbet, Robert G., Albert W. Wardin and Sergei Savinskiy. *Istoriia baptizma* [The history of baptism]. Collection, Ed. 1. Odessa: Bogomyslie, 1996.
- Vins, Ia. Ia. *Nashi baptistskie printsipy* [Our Baptist principles]. 1924, Cl. 5. <http://rusbaptist.stunda.org/vins2.html>. 22.03.11.
- Schmemmann, Alexander. "Missionerskiy imperative" [The missionary imperative]. In Iakov Stamulis, editor, *Pravoslavnoe bogoslovie missii segodnia*. Moscow: St. Tikhon Orthodox Theological Institute, 2002.
- Yanouskaya, V. V. *Hrystsiyanskaya tsarkva u Belarusi u 1863 – 1914 gg.* [The Christian Church in Belarus from 1863-1914]. Minsk: BDU, 2002.
- Q, 2008. *Surveys among ministers and members of fifteen churches practicing a traditional style of worship (2008)*.