

SECTARIANS IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND JOURNALISM (*A Christian Apologetic Perspective*)

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Abstract

The article explores the reflection of the history of Russian Evangelical movement in Russian classical literature and journalism. It marks the typological similarity between some apologetic Orthodox and Evangelical-Baptist sources, emphasizing the distinctive character of "Russian Christianity" as opposed to any "foreign faith." Among Russian Protestants interest is increasing in the ecclesiological mystery, sacraments, and their common history with Orthodoxy; they love the works of the Church Fathers. Orthodox people have become aware of the importance of the Bible, the role of the firm church community, and preaching of the gospel accessible to all. These points of contact create prerequisites for the beginning of fruitful dialogue.

Keywords: evangelical movement, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, apologetics, dialogue.

The crowded meetings of the Radstock/Pashkov communities in St. Petersburg and also the spread of the “Stundo-Baptist” communities in the Ukraine and beyond its borders during the last third of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not go unnoticed in Russian society. The new developments were reported on both in Russian social journalism and fiction. Thus, for example, N. S. Leskov, one of the critics of the evangelical movement in Russia, published his story *Two Swineherds* in 1884, in which – basing his work on real events – he highlighted some differences between the views of the St Petersburg high society evangelicals and the Russian peasant Stundists.

In St Petersburg, he recounted, a young cadet shot a girl who refused to marry him and then mutilated her. The offender was convicted and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The cadet pathetically “repented of his sins” when some members of the Radstock group visited the prison and spoke to him, and they then used their connections for the very early release of their “new brother.” Soon he became a “model member” of the Radstock community and sang with them that he had become “whiter than snow.” Leskov wrote ironically of this while also seriously questioning why the former cadet, taught by the evangelicals about salvation by faith *only*, did not feel any necessity to *suffer* because of his terrible sin and had no more interest in the crippled girl.

The second part of Leskov’s same story demonstrated that he felt certain sympathies for the Stundists’ strictness in matters of faith and piety.^[1] This part of the story was about a Stundist community in the south of Russia. A young peasant Stundist was unfaithful to his wife and became the father of an illegitimate child. The Stundists decided that the man must take responsibility for the child and the mother, must divide his land into two parts, and must pay enough money for their needs. If he refused, he would “go to feed swine” (Luke 15:13-15), a euphemism for excommunication. Finally, the man repented publicly and agreed with the penalty. Leskov wrote, in conclusion:

No knowledge of all sorts of texts and poems could relieve his guilt... These two incidents of the punishment of sinners, [seen] in contrasting ways, probably help in understanding the differences between the customs and directions of the ‘higher life’ sectarians and the customs of the peasants who hold the teaching called the ‘Stunda.’ Obviously, these are not people of a similar kind: the Petersburg cadet who shot the girl would not sing, accompanied by the organ, among the Stundists, but... would go to feed the swine.^[2]

Inevitably facing not only the negative aspects of the life of the first evangelical communities in Russia, the great writers, unlike mercenary-minded and superficial authors, were usually in no hurry to draw definite conclusions. For example, F. M.

^[1] On Leskov’s sympathies for the search for God among Russian people (and not only the Orthodox), see, for instance: T. Il’inskaya, *Fenomen ‘raznoveriya’ v tvorchestve N.S. Leskova* [The phenomenon of ‘raznoverie’ in N.S.

Leskov’s writings], Ph.D. diss. (St. Petersburg State University, 2010).

^[2] N. Leskov, “Two Swineherds” in *Zerkalo Zhizni* [The Mirror of Life] (St. Petersburg: Biblia dlya vsekh, 1999), pp. 467-468.

Dostoevsky, although opposed to the growth of Protestantism in Russia, certainly did not unequivocally condemn Radstock's preaching and the way the Russian aristocracy hospitably welcomed him in their homes. This is how Dostoevsky described his experience:

At that time I happened to hear him [Radstock] preaching in a certain 'hall', and, I recall, I didn't find anything special in him: he did not speak particularly well or particularly badly. Yet he works miracles over human hearts; people flock to hear him; many are deeply moved: they seek out the poor so as to do good deeds for them and almost reach the point of giving away their possessions. However, this may be happening only among us in Russia; it seems he [Radstock] is not so prominent abroad... Nevertheless, he produces remarkable conversions and arouses magnanimous feelings in the hearts of his followers. However, that is as it should be: if he is indeed sincere and is preaching a new faith, then, of course, he is possessed by all the spirit and fervor of the founder of a sect.^[3]

At the same time Dostoevsky was perplexed, wondering why Russian people needed a kind of Protestantism: "In fact, what kind of Protestants, what kind of Germans are our people anyway? And why should they learn German in order to sing psalms? Isn't everything, everything that they are seeking, to be found in Orthodoxy? Does not Orthodoxy, and Orthodoxy alone, contain the truth and the salvation of the Russian People, and in ages yet to come the salvation of the whole of humanity?"^[4]

An interesting and psychologically very exact description of the inconsistencies and ambiguities present in the reception of Protestant ideas in Russia was given by L. N. Tolstoy in his novel *Resurrection* (1899):

The Countess Katerina Ivanovna, however strange it may seem, and however little it seems to be in keeping with the rest of her character, was a staunch adherent to that teaching which holds that the essence of Christianity lies in belief in redemption. She went to meetings where this teaching, then in fashion, was being preached, and assembled the 'faithful' in her own house. Though this teaching repudiated all ceremonies, icons, and sacraments, Katerina Ivanovna had icons in every room, and one on the wall above her bed, and she kept all that the Church prescribed without noticing any contradiction in that.^[5]

At a later date it was not unknown for some Russian Baptists (and especially *Baptist women*), to set aside (*pribrali*) Orthodox icons temporarily – "until better times",

^[3] F. Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, Vol. 1, 1873-1876, trans. by K. Lantz (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1994), pp. 419-420.

^[4] *Ibid.*, p. 192. Dostoevsky partly answered his own question when he admitted: "Our Church has been in a state of *paralysis* since *Peter the Great*; it is a terrible time..." (F. M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy* [The complete works], 30 vols. [Leningrad: Nauka, 1984], v. XXVII, p. 49).

^[5] L. Tolstoy, *Resurrection* (Charleston, S.C.: Forgotten Books, 2008), p. 305. An anonymous author wrote ironically at that time in the magazine edited by F.M. Dostoevsky: "The religious mood of the ladies of Petersburg high society... Ball dresses are packed up in chests for a while, and all have begun to love Christ in honour of the new apostle of Christianity who has arrived in Petersburg, the Englishman Lord Radstock!" ("Novy Apostol v Peterburgskom svete" [The new Apostle in Petersburg high life], *Grazhdanin*, no. 8 [1874]).

as one lady even expressed herself.^[6] Such uncertainty and partial solutions, of course, satisfied neither Orthodox priests nor Baptist presbyters. However, in all this there is something deeply symbolic and natural, and, of course, this happens quite in a Russian way: even decisively breaking with the Russian Orthodox Church, strongly criticizing it, many people still, consciously or unconsciously, preserve essentially Orthodox thinking, or a particular worldview, when Protestantism acclaimed by the mind, is not so clearly taken by the heart.

Although a critical attitude to “the faith of the Reformers” in Russian classical literature apparently prevails (remember Pushkin’s words: “*What is his stage persona?.. Childe Harolde, a Quaker, or a bigot? Or does he show off a mask he has brought?*”^[7]), it can hardly be said that Russian writers and poets spoke of the Western religions only negatively. Not at all. However, in this matter obviously one can distinguish a curious regularity. As Russian writers wrote about Protestantism, they generally saw it as acceptable if it was “in the right place”, i.e. in Europe. If it entered Russia, it should remain among the “Germans” who had moved there. Many Russians sympathized with the “brave Protestants” who had risen against the “Latin heresy.” Orthodoxy historically directed hostility more towards Catholicism than towards Protestantism.^[8] For example, N.M. Karamzin wrote:

“The poor monk Martin Luther came, took off his monastic clothes, and holding in his hand the Gospel, dared to name the Pope Antichrist, exposing his [the Pope’s] lies, self-interest, distortion of the holy.”^[9]

However, when the same Protestantism crossed the “sacred borders” of “Mother Russia” and through “Germans-heretics” affected Orthodox society, the response was, as A. Khomyakov put it: “Protestantism cannot happen here... we stand on completely different soil;”^[10] “we ourselves are Protestants because we denounced Rome many centuries before Luther,” etc. For some Russians in the nineteenth century, little had changed since Ivan the Terrible wrote in 1570 to Jan Rokita, a pastor of the Moravian Brethren, and said: “You are not only a heretic, but a servant of the antichrist and the devil’s council; maybe a greater servant than Luther was. Henceforth, do not bring your teaching in our land! We pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour, to protect our Russian nation from the darkness of your disbelief.”^[11]

^[6] For instance, I once heard an emotional testimony on the subject from a Baptist presbyter in Kazakhstan, mentioning several such “strange events.”

^[7] A. Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, VIII, 8.

^[8] See, for instance: D. Tsvetaev, *Protestantstvo i Protestanty v Rossii do epokhi Preobrazovaniya* [Protestantism and Protestants in Russia before the Age of Reform] (Moscow: Universitetskaya Tipografiya, 1890), pp. 4-7. The Orthodox theologian N. M. Zernov, for instance, wrote that even the devastating Tartar invasion was not so dangerous to Russia as the invasion of “Latin Christianity”. See N. Zernov, *The Russians and*

Their Church (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), p. 22.

^[9] Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva Rossiyskogo* [History of the Russian Empire] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2009), p. 588.

^[10] A. Khomyakov, “Neskol’ko slov Pravoslavnogo Khristianina o zapadnykh veroisповedaniyakh” [A few words of an Orthodox Christian on the Western denominations] in A. Khomyakov, *Tserkov’ Odna* [The Church is one] (Moscow: Dar’, 2005), p. 97.

^[11] Ivan Grozny, *Sochineniya* [Works] (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000), p. 115.

Such an attitude towards Protestantism *within the country*, in general terms, was preserved in Russia also in the following centuries. However, Russian Orthodoxy hardly triumphed because of this. After all, it was not a victory in a free discussion with Protestants, but only a peremptory shout against dissenters.

Yet Protestantism did have an appeal to the Russian soul. One of the greatest Russian poets with fine sense of matters of faith, F. I. Tyutchev, who, by the way, shared some of the radical views of Slavophiles and Pan-Slavists,^[12] wrote his famous lines:

I love the services of Lutherans,
Their rite so stern, so weighty, so simple.
I understand the sacred teaching
Of these naked walls, this empty temple.^[13]

Against the background of the deep crisis in the Orthodox Church at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the best representatives of Russian society raised their voices in defense of the sectarians – especially when the authorities started a new campaign of their severest persecutions. For example, Leo Tolstoy's articles and his active participation on behalf of the needs of the Dukhobors are well known.^[14] In one of his "intercessory" works, Tolstoy noted:

The half-savage Cossacks who beat the Dukhobors by order of the officers, 'very soon began to be tired of it'... That means conscience began to agitate them; and the authorities, fearing the influence of the Dukhobors upon them, hastened to withdraw them. Never was there a persecution of innocent people which has not ended in the persecutors receiving the principles of the persecuted.^[15]

The democratic opposition to absolutism within the Empire, coupled with pressure exerted on Russia by public opinion in Western Protestant countries, meant that sectarians were not completely deprived of their civil rights. According to one of the testimonies of that time, the Ober-Prokuror (Director General) of the Orthodox Holy Synod, Konstantin P. Pobedonostsev, railed that the sectarians were "filling Europe with their complaints."^[16]

^[12] For example, he dreamed about winning back Constantinople from the Turks: "Is it not already time to cross yourself, to strike the *bell in Tsargrad?* ...O, Russia, how great is the coming day – the *universal, Orthodox day!*" – F. Tyutchev, *Stikhotvoreniya* [Poems] (Moscow: Pravda, 1978), p. 168. However, simultaneously, there were some "European" features in Tyutchev's Slavophilism. See, for instance, a remarkable work: B. Bukhshtab, *Russkie poety* [Russian poets] (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1970), pp. 9-75.

^[13] *Poems and Political Letters of F.I. Tyutchev*, trans. by J. Zeldin (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), p. 45.

^[14] See, for instance: "Posleslovie k stat'e P. I. Biryukova 'Goneniye na khristian v Rossii v 1895 g.'"

[Afterword to the article 'The persecution of Christians in Russia in 1895' by P. I. Biryukov], and "Pis'mo v inostrannye gazety po povodu goneniya na kavkazskikh dukhoborov" [Letter to foreign newspapers about persecutions of the Caucasian Dukhobors] in L. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy* [Complete works], 90 vols. (Moscow: GIHL, 1956), vol. XXXIX, pp. 99-105, 209-215.

^[15] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

^[16] See S. Savinsky, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Ukraini, Rossii, Belorussii* [History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the Ukraine, Russia, and Belorussia] (1867–1917) (St. Petersburg: Biblia dlya vsekh, 1999), p. 171.

Many Russian writers and public figures, impelled by an individual rather than a “state” understanding of Orthodoxy, and influenced by general democratic values, selflessly defended the freedom of conscience of the first Russian evangelicals. Among those who were prominent in their civic stand were V. S. Soloviev,^[17] A. M. Bobrshchev-Pushkin,^[18] A. S. Prugavin,^[19] A. F. Koni,^[20] S. P. Melgunov,^[21] and others. For example, the famous philosopher Vladimir Soloviev wrote to Pobedonostsev in 1892:

The politics of religious persecution and the *violent spread* of official *Orthodoxy* have clearly exhausted the Divine patience... Meanwhile, from right and left, from Eastern Siberia to the western border of European Russia, reports are coming that this situation is not becoming milder, but is even getting worse. The missionary congress in Moscow, with unprecedented cynicism, has proclaimed the powerlessness of spiritual means of struggle against schism and sectarianism, as well as the necessity of the secular sword.^[22]

In his work “On Spiritual Authority in Russia,” V. S. Soloviev spoke bitterly about some distinctive features of the historical path of the Russian Orthodox Church during the days when its ecclesiastical leaders were not of the best: “At first, during the time of Nikon, it reached for the *crown of the State*, then it grappled persistently for the *sword of the State*, and finally it was forced to don the *uniform of the State*.”^[23]

S. P. Melgunov, a famous historian, also noted the dramatic situation with the rights of Russian Protestants: “The issues of freedom of conscience and freedom of belief, which are regulated with difficulty by any administrative requirements, cannot be under the authority of executive police power...”^[24]

Orthodoxy was defended by administrative and bureaucratic means, including brutal compulsion of sectarians, i.e. practically by medieval measures, but this policy diminished rather than enhanced the church and its clergy. According to the Russian writer P. I. Melnikov (Pechersky), “Our people do not respect the clergy because the clergy themselves continually present examples of lack of respect for the faith.”^[25]

^[17] See, for instance: V. Soloviev, “O dukhovnoy vlasti v Rossii” [On spiritual authority in Russia] in V. Soloviev, *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected works], 9 vols. (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaya pol’za, 1901), vol. III, pp. 206-220.

^[18] See, for instance: A. Bobrshchev-Pushkin, *Sud i raskol’niki-sektanty* [The court and dissenters-sectarians] (St. Petersburg: Senatskaya Tipografiya, 1902).

^[19] See, for instance: A. Prugavin, *Monastyrskie tyur’mi v bor’be s sektantstvom: K voprosu o veroterpimosti* [Monastery prisons in the struggle against sectarianism: On the issue of toleration] (Moscow: Posrednik, 1905).

^[20] See, for instance: A. F. Koni, “Shtundisty” [The Stundists] in A. F. Koni, *Na zhiznennom puti: Iz zapisok sudebnogo deyatelya* [On life’s path: From the notes of a lawyer], 2 vols. (Moscow: T-vo I.D. Sytina, 1914), vol. I, pp. 600-632.

^[21] See, for instance: S. Melgunov, *Tserkov’ i*

gosudarstvo v Rossii: K voprosu o svobode sovesti [Church and state in Russia: On the issue of freedom of conscience] (Moscow: T-vo I.D. Sytina, 1907).

^[22] K.P. Pobedonostsev *i ego korrespondenty: Pis’ma i zapiski* [K.P. Pobedonostsev and his correspondents: Letters and memoranda] (Moscow—Petrograd: Gos. Izd-vo, 1923), vol. I, part 2, p. 969.

^[23] V. Soloviev, *Freedom, Faith, and Dogma: Essays by V.S. Soloviev on Christianity and Judaism*, trans. by V. Wozniuk (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 25.

^[24] S. Melgunov, “Shtundisty ili baptisty? Po povodu sudebnogo presledovaniya sektantov po 29 st. Ustava o nakazaniyakh” [Stundists or Baptists? On the subject of the prosecution of sectarians according to Article 29 of the Penal Code], *Russkaya mysl’*, vol. XI (1903), p. 166.

^[25] P. Melnikov, “Zapiska o russkom raskole” [A report on the Russian schism], in V. Kelsiev,

However, during the formation period of the first Stundist and Baptist congregations in the 1860s and 1870s, not all sectarians had sought to break with the Orthodoxy. There is evidence that many of them continued to attend church for years, singing Orthodox hymns, asking the parish priests to assist at weddings, burials, and so on, although they already had their own meetings.^[26] The process of disengagement from the official church was greatly accelerated by the persecutions which Russian sectarians began to suffer at a certain point.^[27]

While in Europe the ideas of freedom of conscience and religious tolerance, having had a difficult path of evolution^[28] up to the second half of the nineteenth century, were already the norm, in Russia the archaic Byzantine “symphony” of the empire and the church still completely dominated. This apparent disharmony in the areas of development of Christian culture in the West and the East, the negative aspects of national self-isolation, and the over-idealization of olden times were expressed by the Russian philosopher V. V. Rozanov in the following parable:

Decaying and dying Byzantium whispered to Russia all of its vexations and bequeathed them to Russia to guard them. Russia, at the bedside of the departing one, fascinated by these deathbed sighs, took them gently to her child’s heart and gave her word to the dying—mortal enmity against the Western tribes... Byzantium whispered to Russia that ‘statutes’, ‘regulations’ are the most important thing in religion, the essence of faith ... Child-Russia took fright at this incomprehensible, but holy for her idea and made every effort, gigantic, heroic, up to martyrdom and self-crucifixion, into her young being pressed into the shape that the ancient mummy bequeathed to her in its sighs.^[29]

Though somewhat extreme, this picture reflects the spirit of the age, when outworn Orthodoxy in Russia (as a State religion) was in danger of appearing to be played out. This fueled a growing desire for reform. The idea of a great Church Council, unprecedented in the history of Russia up to that time, was in the air.^[30] At the same time, as some within Orthodoxy were seeking to respond positively to the challenges of the times, Russian evangelical movements were developing their own life within the empire. In part a natural reaction to the evident problems of Orthodoxy,

ed., *Sbornik pravitel'stvennykh svedeniy o raskol'nikakh* [Collection of government data on schismatics], Part 1 (London: Trubner & Co., Paternoster Row, 1860), p. 189.

^[26] See, for instance: A. Borozdin, “Stundism” in S. Averintsev, ed., *Khristianstvo: Entsiklopedichesky slovar'* [Christianity: An encyclopedic dictionary], 3 vols. (Moscow: Bolshaya Rossiyskaya entsiklopediya, 1995), vol. III, p. 247.

^[27] See the detailed reviews of the anti-sectarian laws and police instructions before the Bolshevik Revolution: Savinsky, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, pp. 169-189, 217-238; A. Blane, “The Relations between the Russian Protestant Sects and the State, 1900-1921,” PhD diss. (Duke University, 1964), pp. 26-97.

^[28] For example, the terrible Spanish Inquisition officially lasted until 1834. See: E. Peters, “Inquisition” in B. Marthaler, ed., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 15 vols. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), v. VII, p. 490.

^[29] V. Rozanov, “Russkaya tserkov'” [The Russian church], *Polyarnaya zvezda*, vol. 8 (1906), p. 525.

^[30] See, for instance: S. Rimsky, *Rossiyskaya tserkov' v epokhu velikikh reform* [The Russian church in the age of the great reforms] (Moscow: Krutitskoe Patriarshee Podvor'e, 1999), pp. 190-214; M. Shkarovsky, *Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov pri Staline i Khrushcheve* [The Russian Orthodox Church during the time of Stalin and Khrushchev], pp. 68-71.

they were also one of the responses to the new historical developments within Russian society in the 1860s and 1870s. The eminent Ukrainian poet, T. G. Shevchenko, who looked quite objectively at Orthodox–Protestant issues (certainly by comparison with Orthodox priests on the one hand and sectarian preachers on the other), powerfully expressed the religious feelings of the ordinary people in one of his later poems, composed on the eve of the beginning of the widespread evangelical awakening in the Ukraine. What he wrote breathes something of the spirit of Stundism:

They know no faith without a cross,
 They know no faith without a priest...
The people lie
 And the Byzantine Lord Sabaoth
 Deceives! But God does not...
 He will help us bear our grief,
 And bury our sorrows by dark of night
 In a quiet and joyful hut.^[31]

Yet there was also a focus, among both the Orthodox and the evangelicals, on past events in Russian religious history. In the case of the Orthodox, this valuing of the past is not surprising. But Russian Baptist communities, in a paradoxical way, showed a similarly “extremely conservative,” national-religious spirit. Both Orthodox and evangelical took the view that God had given to Christianity in Russia a unique identity and a world-wide importance. As far back as Tsar Ivan the Terrible, this great-power tone could be heard: “The Greeks are no Gospel to us. We believe not in the Greeks but in Christ. We received the Christian faith at the birth of the Christian Church.”^[32]

A Russian man of great learning, monk A. Sukhanov, once brought from Mount Athos to Patriarch Nikon many ancient manuscripts of the Orthodoxy, in his “Debate about the Faith” (1650) argued: “Listen, you Greeks, and heed this. Do not boast, and do not call yourselves the source, because today the words of the Lord have been fulfilled in you: you were first, and now you are last; whereas we were last, but now we are first...”^[33]

^[31] T. Shevchenko, “Likere” [To Likera] [1860] in T. Shevchenko, *Zibrannya tvoriv* [Collected works] (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 2003), vol. II, p. 351. Among those who may be regarded as Ukrainian forerunners of Russian Protestantism was also the philosopher G. S. Skovoroda, who sympathized with the “Spiritual Christians” and had very simple ceremonies; he was known for the following words: “He who has no needs is near to heaven.” On the close relation of Skovoroda to the Doukhobors, see M. Karetnikova, “Russkoe Bogoisatel’stvo” [The Russian God-search], *Al’manakh po istorii russkogo baptizma*, vol. I (1999), pp. 60–66; Yu. Reshet-

nikov, and S. Sannikov, *Obzor istorii evangel’sko-baptistskogo bratstva na Ukraine* [A review of the history of the Evangelical–Baptist brotherhood in the Ukraine] (Odessa: Bogomyслиe, 2000), pp. 62–63.

^[32] Cited in A. Kartashev, “Byl li Apostol Andrey na Rusi?” [Did the Apostle Andrew visit Russia?], *Khristianskoe Chtenie*, no. 7 (1907), p. 93. See also Golubinsky, *Istoriya russkoy tserkvi*, vol. I, part 1, p. 27.

^[33] A. Sukhanov, “Preniya o vere” [Debate on the faith], *Chteniya v obshchestve istorii i drevnostey rossiyskikh*, no. 2 (1894), p. 101.

This tradition was willingly continued by Archpriest Avvakum in his famous speech to the Greek Patriarchs (1667) when he, in particular, stated, “Your Orthodoxy became motley because of the violence of the Turkish Mahomed... You became frail. So in the future come and learn from us. By the grace of God we have autocracy.”^[34] And the restless archpriest admonished Tsar Alexis Mikhaylovich: “Say in Russian: ‘Lord, forgive me, a sinner!’ Be done with the *Kyrie-eleison*^[35] – this is what the Greeks say – spit on them! For thou art the son of Mikhail: a Russian, not a Greek. Speak thy native tongue... We ought to speak as Christ taught us.”^[36]

It was a tradition that was alive in the thinking of many Orthodox authors, for instance, N. S. Leskov, who questioned, “Whether or not we are obligated to the Greeks because we know of God through them – you cannot demonstrate or prove that the Greeks revealed him to us. We found him neither in the magnificence of Byzantium nor in the smoke of the censor, but he is simply our known co-sufferer, walking everywhere with us...”^[37]

What is more remarkable is that somewhat similar ideas were to be found among Russian evangelical writers. For many of them it was intolerable to suggest that Russian Protestants are not “fully Russian” because they adopted some religious beliefs “from the Germans.” One of the first Russian Baptists who exemplified such an approach to this issue in his writings was the powerful figure of V. V. Ivanov. He wrote: “Baptist beliefs in Russia... are much more unique and national than Byzantine Orthodoxy, and even more so: they are absolutely unique, i.e. they arose without the slightest influence from German Baptists.”^[38]

S. N. Savinsky, a leading historian of the Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists, continued with some reservations the “apologetic” line of V. V. Ivanov. Looking at the reasons for the beginnings of evangelical communities in Russia in the nineteenth century, he put direct divine action in the first place. Referring to the early colporteurs distributing the Holy Scriptures in Russia he says: “None other than the Holy Spirit inspired those who were insignificant in the eyes of the world, modest people, but men of spirit.” He goes on to speak of the “spontaneous” beginnings of the Society for the Distribution of the Scriptures in Russia and – in the same period – the “unique evangelical awakening among the Molokans of Transcaucasia” and among peasants in the south of Ukraine. According to Savinsky, the fact that these events were simultaneous is “wrapped in mystery” and “can be explained only by the action of the Holy Spirit.”^[39]

M. S. Karetnikova continued this interpretative approach: “The Ukrainian peasants did not adopt any ‘German faith’! None of them became Lutheran, Reformed, or Mennonite... While terrible religious ignorance and superstitions dominated

^[34] *Zhitie Avvakuma i drugie ego sochineniya* [The life of Avvakum and his other writings] (Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1991), p. 60.

^[35] Lord, have mercy! (Greek)

^[36] *Zhitie Avvakuma i drugie ego sochineniya*, p. 273.

^[37] N. Leskov, “Na krayu sveta” in N. Leskov, *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected works], 12 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), v. I, p. 348.

^[38] V. Ivanov, *Kniga Episkopa Alekseya* [The Book of Bishop Alexis], *Baptist*, no. 9 (1908), p. 24.

^[39] Savinsky, *Istoriya evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, p. 162.

among the people, Stundism should be considered as a miracle and God's favor with us."^[40]

S. V. Sannikov also denies much German influence: "This ideological point of view is not supported by historical facts."^[41]

Savinsky concludes in a patriotic vein: "None of them (German missionaries. – C.P.) 'seduced' any Orthodox into the Baptist faith..."; "the historical truth reveals itself: the Russian-Ukrainian Baptist beliefs were not an outside implanting... but were the result of seeking for fellowship with the living God, and issued from the depths of the national spirit, awakened by the Holy Spirit and by God's Word."^[42]

The point to be noted here is not so much the extent to which the statements are correct or not (in our opinion they are somewhat one-sided). The significance of the perspectives is the degree to which, in their determination to play down German influence on Russian Baptists, they are in keeping with the apologia of Russian Orthodoxy with its tendency to distance itself from Greek influence. Both Orthodox and Baptist authors in Russia readily admit the adoption by their traditions of external aspects of the religious life that they saw elsewhere (for instance, ceremonies). However, they did not usually go beyond that. The majority of them object to any talk of a "foreign faith" even if their statements cannot seriously be substantiated.

There were always an abundance of Russian Orthodox thinkers who, bypassing the Greeks, saw the beginning of Russian Christianity in the missionary work of the Apostle Andrew. The following is a characteristic statement of this tradition: "They asked Arseniy: 'where did you adopt the faith if not from us, the Greeks?' Arseniy said: 'we adopted the faith from God, not from you, and took baptism initially from St. Apostle Andrew... At the time when St. Apostle Andrew was in Tsargrad, he travelled across the Black Sea to us, and then we accepted baptism from him, not from the Greeks'";^[43] "truly Russia is not any less than any other Eastern nation, because the Apostle enlightened it too."^[44]

So, it is no wonder that there are some Russian Baptists who enthusiastically draw their *Protestant* beliefs if not from John the *Baptist* himself, then certainly not from the Reformation in Europe, but at least from Novgorod Strigolniki who lived a century and a half before Martin Luther. Politely mentioning German Baptist sensibilities, "May the German brothers not be offended at us,"^[45] they then start their original interpretations of Old Russian history. Here are some examples from respected authors, to some degree expressing widespread opinions held within the ECB community:

^[40] Karetnikova, *Russkoe Bogoiskatel'stvo*, p. 77. It is interesting that the Baptists in Russia from the beginning had an international movement, which included representatives of many nations, as opposed to, for instance, the Menonites and Lutherans (mainly German denominations in the Russian Empire).

^[41] S. Sannikov, *Dvadsat' vekov khristianstva* [Twenty centuries of Christianity], 2 vols. (Odesa: Bogomyслиe, 2001), vol. II, pp. 511-512.

^[42] S. Savinsky, "Baptisty v Rossii v XIX veke" [The Baptists in Russia in the XIX century] in

Istoriya Baptizma, pp. 334, 343.

^[43] Cited in A. Kartashev, *Ocherki po istorii russkoy tserkvi* [Essays on the history of the Russian church], 2 vols. (Paris: YMCA-PRESS, 1991), vol. II, pp. 126-127.

^[44] Cited in S. Soloviev, *Sochineniya* [Works], 18 vols., part 5: *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen* [The history of Russia since the earliest times], vol. IX-X (Moscow: Mysl', 1990), p. 414.

^[45] I had occasion to hear this phrase repeatedly from convinced «native soil conservatives» among Russian Baptists.

In the 14th century uncoordinated outbreaks of religious protest streamed out in the large *Protestant* movement known under the name of the Strigolniks. The modern Russian Baptists consider the Strigolniks their remote ancestors, seeing in their doctrinal statements and practice of life many kindred elements.^[46]

There is a strong resemblance between the teachings of the Strigolniks, these evangelical Christians of the 14th-15th centuries, and the believers of the evangelical awakening in Russia in the 19th century... The movement of the Strigolniks... was the “native product of the Russian mind.”^[47]

The forerunners of the evangelical movement in Russia were... the Bogomils (12th cent.), the Strigolniks (14th cent.), the Old Believers’ priestless bodies (17th cent.), the Dukhobors and the Molokans (18th cent.), and the Stundists (19th cent.).^[48]

Listening to such apologetic statements by the representatives of both parties (Russian Orthodox and Baptists), a critically thinking man, in our opinion, would certainly note their common weakness: the burning desire to present the real history of their confessions as more ancient and glorious than it would be possible to prove scientifically. On the one hand both the Orthodox and the Baptists are adopting the same methods to defend their traditions, while on the other hand, in a paradoxical way, the attempt by each to show that their own tradition is unique at times has pushed both Orthodox people and Baptists towards apparently irreconcilable opposition to each other.

Like the Jews who have for a long time have emotionally denied the right of the church to be based on their (historically) Holy Scriptures and religious tradition, or like the same “arrogant Greeks,” many Orthodox authors apparently to this day cannot reconcile themselves to the idea that Russian Protestantism has living roots in the Eastern Christian (Orthodox) tradition.^[49] And the following is no less strange and symptomatic: not only the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church but also many Russian Baptists do not often even hear about or admit their obvious (from a historical point of view) spiritual and natural ties with Orthodoxy.^[50] The problem here, apparently, among other things, is in the extreme heterogeneity of Russian Baptists: the “Westerners” more willingly recognize the foreign origin of the brotherhood, but the “Slavophil” wing would rather accept the influence of Orthodoxy (just not “the Germans”). Some Russian Baptists will finally say like A. Sukhanov: “Our faith is from God” (period!)^[51]

^[46] V. Popov, “Protestanty zemli russkoy” [The Protestants of the Russian Land], *NG-Religii*, 19 September 2007.

^[47] S. Savinsky, “Strigol’niki” [The Strigolniks], *Al'manakh “Bogomyslie”*, vol. 1 (1990), p. 188.

^[48] Trubchik, *Vera i traditsiya*, p. 271. See also an extensive historical review of the origins of Russian Protestantism in the work of a Pentecostal author: V. Franchuk, *Proсила Rossiya dozhdy u Gospoda* [Russia asked the Lord for rain], 3 vols. (Kiev, 2001-2003).

^[49] The extreme apologists of Russian Orthodoxy would prefer complete unbelief (just

not “heterodoxy” or Protestantism), claiming that the Communists “providentially took care of” Russia for the coming triumph of Orthodoxy. See, for instance: I. Podberezsky, *Protestanty i drugie* [Protestants and others] (St. Petersburg: Mirt, 2000), pp. 66-67.

^[50] “That was not our own mother but the wicked stepmother!” is often said about the Russian Orthodox Church, remembering their old grievances and oppressions. An example is the testimony of the Baptist presbyter V. N. Khot’ko (Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan, 1999).

^[51] Sukhanov, “Preniya o vere”, p. 40. In fact,

In one of his books, Archpriest J. Meyendorff draws attention to the fact that Tertullian, even after associating himself with Montanism, wrote a number of important works which were marked by an “Orthodox spirit.”^[52] And one of the most important works of Tertullian remains his *Prescription against Heretics*. Thus, heresy is a complex and not always perceptible concept.^[53] The formal heretic Tertullian proves to be *Orthodox*, and a considerable number of nominally Orthodox theologians throughout the ages have demonstrated a shocking *sectarian* spirit, intolerance to dissent.^[54]

It is interesting to note that many members of the Baptist community have always shown their “non-sectarian openness,” tenderness, and even some good nature towards other denominations (Orthodox, Pentecostals, Mennonites, etc.) and often retold with a smile and did not conceal the popular Orthodox accusations against them: “The Baptists are the most harmful sect,” “Kat’ka^[55] invited a German [to Russia] to plant potatoes, but instead he planted the *Stunda* for us,” and so on.^[56] It seems this is one of the signs of the spiritual maturity of the Russian Baptists.

A Christian thinker said that God’s truth is too great for any one mind, or church, or denomination, and Christians will find out in eternity that none of them had the full truth. Orthodoxy and Protestantism are “two provinces of Christendom.”^[57] Russian Orthodoxy and Russian Protestantism are from a single internal government. About a similar nominal geographic location N. V. Gogol memorably said in *The Government Inspector* by the mouth of one of his characters: “You could gallop from here for three years and not reach a foreign country!”^[58] Therefore the Russian Christians, even if they belong to different denominations and streams (as it has happened historically), if they are Christians not by name only, should not neglect each other or oversensitively seek out some ill-intentioned foreigners.

The Russian Protestants, undoubtedly, are increasing their interest in the ecclesiological mystery, in what the Church is in its mystical depth; they are interested in the sacraments, in their common history with Orthodoxy; they love the works of the Church Fathers, who are perceived today by many Protestants as “also our fathers.” On the other hand, the Orthodox people have a growing awareness of the importance of the Bible, the necessity of reading it regularly, the role of a good church commu-

some modern Russian Baptist confessional historians come close to this assertion.

^[52] J. Meyendorff, *Vvedenie v svyatootecheskoe bogoslovie* [Introduction to Patristic theology] (N.Y.: RBR, 1985), p. 52.

^[53] For example, Archpriest O. Stenyaev curiously interpreted the Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan in relation to our time: an Orthodox priest, hurrying to his occasional religious rites, passed close by the suffering man, but a sectarian stopped to help him, bandaged his wounds, etc. See: Pravoslavie.Ru (online journal), 1 Feb. 2005, URL: <<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/news/print12544.htm>>.

^[54] This cannot be said better than Archbishop I. Shakhovskoy said it. See: I. Shakhovskoy,

“Sektantstvo v pravoslavii i pravoslavie v sektantstve” [Sectarianism in Orthodoxy and Orthodoxy in sectarianism], *Pravoslavnaya Obshchina*, no. 4 (1992), pp. 71-77.

^[55] They were speaking of the Russian Empress Catherine the Great.

^[56] My attention was drawn to this by the Baptist historian S.N. Savinsky (INT, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, 2006).

^[57] H. Stammmer, “Russian Orthodoxy in Recent Protestant Church History and Theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, nos. 3-4 (1979), p. 215.

^[58] N. V. Gogol, *The Government Inspector*, trans. by D. Campbell (London: Sylvan Press, 1947), p. 29.

nity, and lively and accessible preaching of the gospel. I think these points of contact are sufficient to initiate a respectful and fruitful dialogue.

V. S. Soloviev in his book *Three Conversations* (1900) clearly shows the diversity of God's truth and explains the denominational differences in the Christian world speaking of the three great Apostles of Christ (and the authors of the New Testament) as pointing to three great Christian traditions: Peter to Roman Catholicism, John to Eastern Orthodoxy, and Paul to Protestantism.^[59] Soloviev sees these traditions as in a measure mutually enriching and supplementing each other. Obviously, Christians should approach the same goal today.

That does not cancel any correctly expressed critical remarks to each other or, all the more, Christian self-criticism. For example, unlike some of the Baptists of Georgia, who, for some time, in my opinion, openly turned to the *stylization* of their liturgical practice to resemble the national Orthodox tradition of olden times,^[60] Slavic Baptist churches, as a rule, strongly oppose this approach. In the direction of the Georgian Baptists one senses a certain artificiality: their outer "Orthodox form," it seems, is far ahead of their "Baptist contents." In any case such a conclusion can be drawn based on the confessional history of the Baptist brotherhood, its creed, and a certain evangelical subculture that has developed during the last 150 years. In the church life of the Slavic Baptists one can observe the opposite trend: they may condemn certain formal, external attributes of Orthodoxy among church members (crosses, icons, etc.), but at the same time their church meetings often include a deeply Orthodox – in its *essence* and *spirit* – preaching.

Beneath the apparent storm of dramatic conflict between the Orthodox and the Baptist Christians in Russia that has now lasted more than a century there are concealed some differently expressed but similar and related, very common Slavic ideas...

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^[59] V. Solovyov, *War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations, Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ* (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Press, 1990).

^[60] See, for instance: W.B. Boswell, "Liturgy and Revolution Part II: Radical Christianity, Radical Democracy, and Revolution in Georgia", *Religion in Eastern Europe*, vol. XXVII, no. 3 (2007), pp. 15-31; *Mezhdunarodnaya Khristianskaya Gazeta*, no. 7 (2005), p. 6.

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