

“Sparks of Truth”: I.S. Prokhanov and the Bohemian Reformation

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Аннотация

Среди поклонников Яна Гуса и гуситов за границей был президент Всероссийского Союза Евангельских христиан, Иван Степанович Проханов (1869–1935), который посетил Чехословакию в 1924 г. Во время своего шестинедельного пребывания, он изучал гуситское движение и 1 апреля был рукоположен ассоциацией чехословацких баптистов, которые так называли себя после того, как Петр Хельчицкий (ок.1390–ок.1443), богослов гуситского периода, утверждал разделение церкви и государства и практиковал крещение по вере. Так как у Проханова было много международных связей, какие факторы могли мотивировать его искать рукоположение от этой группы, в частности? Эта статья представляет собой основной обзор вклада Яна Гуса и Петра Хельчицкого и описывает, как чешская Реформация стала центральной частью исторического нарратива народа Чехословакии и идентичности баптистов. В заключение рассмотрены собственные размышления Проханова о значении этих исторических личностей и событий для российского евангельского движения.

Ключевые слова: Гуситы, евангельское движение в России, рукоположение, Союз Богемских Братьев.

Abstract

Among the admirers of Hus and the Hussites abroad was the president of the All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869–1935), who visited Czechoslovakia in 1924. During his six-week stay, he studied the Hussite movement with some care and on 1 April was ordained by an association of Czechoslovak Baptists who had named themselves after Petr Chelčický (?1390–?1443), a theologian of the Hussite period, who asserted the separation of church and state and practiced baptism on profession of faith. Since Prokhanov had many international connections, what factors may have motivated him to seek ordination from this group in particular? This paper presents a basic sketch of the contributions of Jan Hus and Petr Chelčický and describes how the Bohemian Reformation became a central part both of the historical narrative of the nation of Czechoslovakia and of the identity of Baptists. It concludes with an examination of Prokhanov's own reflections on the meaning of these historical figures and events for the Russian evangelical movement.

Keywords: Hussite, Russian evangelical movement, ordination, Unity of Brethren, Bohemia

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The Czechoslovak state was barely six years old when Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869–1935), a citizen of nearly seven-year-old Soviet Russia, paid a visit to Prague. Prokhanov was the president of the All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, which he had founded in 1909. Since 1911 he had been a vice-president of the Baptist World Alliance. According to that organization's 1923 statistical summary of Baptists in Europe, the Evangelical Christians were included despite their name because they were “strictly Baptists and in fact resemble American Baptists in certain points more closely than do members of the ‘All-Russian Baptist Union.’”^[1] It was still true, however, that Prokhanov and the Evangelical Christians were not committed to a narrowly Baptist denominational identity. Some of them objected to the name “Baptist” on principle as foreign, and un-Russian.^[2] Instead, Prokhanov was inspired by the Evangelical Alliance^[3] and its vision of unity and cooperation on the basis of commonly-held Christian convictions.^[4] In 1908, he had established an Evangelical Union in Russia in an attempt to bring together different kinds of evangelically-minded individuals in an Alliance-like organization.^[5] Later on he reached beyond evangelical circles to interact with reform-minded Orthodox as well.^[6] Prokhanov's critics accused him of wishing to dominate the entire Russian evangelical movement by taking these steps.^[7] Be that as it may, he was certainly interested in making

^[1] Third Baptist World Congress. July 21-27, 1923. Record of Proceedings (London: Kingsgate Press, 1923), p. 87.

^[2] AUCEC-B, *Istoriia VSEKh-B v Sovetskom Soiuze* (Moscow: AUCEC-B, 1989), p. 131; Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 44–45

^[3] For a detailed history of the Evangelical Alliance, see Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2001).

^[4] Gregory L. Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V. Kargel (1849-1937)*, (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), pp. 121-124, 243.

^[5] Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia* (New York: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 193), pp. 149-152; for more analysis of the Evangelical Union in Russia, see Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangel'skie khristiane v Rossii i Sovetskom soiuze: Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov, 1869-1935, i put' evangel'skikh khristian i baptistov*, trans. by P. I. Skvortsov, 1978, CD disc *Istoriia evangel'skogo dvizheniia v Evrazii 4.0*, Elektronnaia khristianskaia biblioteka (Odessa: EAAA), pp. 102-106.

^[6] Prokhanoff, *Cauldron*, pp. 210-216. Note that Prokhanov was criticized for devoting more time and attention to Orthodox than to Baptists, see AUCEC-B, *Istoriia VSEKh-B v Sovetskom Soiuze* (Moscow: AUCEC-B, 1989), pp. 195-196.

^[7] Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, p. 45; for a sharply polemical account of the differences between Baptists and the Evangelical Christians from a slightly later Baptist point of view (1921), see N. I. Peisti and R. A. Fetler, “Raznitsa mezhdru Baptistami i tak nazyvaemyimi ‘Evangel'skimi Khristianami” (The

connections with as many like-minded believers as he could all over the world, as well as broadening the Russian evangelicals' identity.

Concerning his trip to Czechoslovakia he explained, "For a long time I have dreamed of visiting this forward-looking, cultured country, related to us by language. I have especially wanted to acquaint myself with the spiritual legacy of the great Slavic reformers."^[8] He was a most energetic and studious tourist. In connection with his visit Prokhanov wrote two articles, two poems, translated a hymn with words by Jan Hus (?1369–1415), and compiled a list of quotations by Hus and Petr Chelčický (?1390–?1443), who is considered the spiritual father of the Hussite movement. These items made up most of issue No. 5 of the Evangelical Christian journal *Khristianin* (The Christian) in 1924. In other words, if Prokhanov only spent six weeks in Czechoslovakia in the spring he would have had to work extensively and rapidly to research, write, and compose all that he did for the May issue of the journal. Nor was that all he intended to write. At the end of the second article he expressed the hope that more articles on the Hussite movement would be forthcoming.^[9] Obviously, Prokhanov had a great deal to tell his readers about the Hussites.

It is significant that Prokhanov had come to Czechoslovakia specifically to seek ordination. Traditionally the Evangelical Christians had not emphasized ordination as a requirement for ministry, but the issue had become more urgent at the group's eighth congress in Petrograd in 1921.^[10] If other church leaders were to be ordained, it made no sense for Prokhanov as the denominational leader not to be. Accordingly, Prokhanov carried a letter to Prague from the Evangelical Christian church in Leningrad stating the group's desire that he be ordained by the Chelčický Unity of Brethren, a group of fifteen Baptist congregations that had formed an association in 1919. The letter read in part, "The members of the council of the congregation pray to the Lord that this holy act might serve [to further] fellowship with the western brethren and the greater blessing of the works of God in Russia."^[11] Indeed, as Vladimir Popov notes, "Prokhanov and his co-workers... understood the ordination not only as an act of prayerful dedication to ministry. This event was also a sign of international recognition of the Russian evangelical movement and the spiritual authority of Ivan Stepanovich."^[12]

Yet Prokhanov was a leader with many international connections. Why did he turn to the Czechoslovak Baptists in particular when it came to seeking ordination? The answer lies in the particular legacy of the Hussite movement, which managed to retain a powerful hold on popular imagination, far beyond that of any other Reformation-

difference between Baptists and the so-called "Evangelical Christians"), *Blagovestnik*, Nos. 3-4 (1921): 47-49.

^[8] I[van] S[tepanovich] P[rokhhanov], "Na rodine Jana Gusa i Petra Khel'chitskogo," *Khristianin*, No. 5 (1924): 23.

^[9] I.S.P., "Jan Gus i Petr Khel'chitskii kak uchiteli dukhovnoi zhizni," *Khristianin*, No. 5 (1924):7, 18, 22.

^[10] AUCEC-B, *Istoriia*, p. 189.

^[11] Quoted by V. A. Popov, "Poezdki Prokhanova za rubezh," *Bratskii vestnik*, No. 1 (1990): 55.

^[12] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

era movement or individual leader. This paper will therefore outline briefly the main events of the Hussite reformation^[13] and then reflect on the perception of those events from the point of view of early twentieth-century Czechoslovak Baptists and I. S. Prokhanov.

A strong impulse toward the reform of the Roman Catholic Church gathered momentum during the fourteenth century. In particular, the papal schism, which began in 1309 with the removal of the Pope of Rome to France, and continued with a confusing succession of rival popes and bishops until 1417, seriously damaged papal claims to authority. In addition, the general corruption of the church was a matter of widespread concern. These things formed the backdrop of the career of Jan Hus, whose twentieth-century admirers regarded him not merely as an “early” Reformer, but as the originator of the entire movement.^[14] He became rector of the University of Prague in 1401 and in 1402 was appointed preacher at Bethlehem Chapel. He was above all a people’s preacher, appreciated for his clear and simple sermons, full of direct applications, rendered in understandable Czech rather than Latin. He also encouraged congregational singing in Czech.

At that time much debate was engendered in the university over the writings of the English reformer John Wyclif (d. 1384). As for Hus himself, while he did not accept Wyclif’s rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation, he did concur with Wyclif that the true church is invisible, composed of the elect of God. Concerned chiefly with the moral reform of the church, Hus maintained with Wyclif that the elect could be recognized by their behavior, which must surely resemble that of the apostles—a point that obviously disqualified unworthy priests and threatened the church hierarchy. From his pulpit at Bethlehem Chapel Hus attacked simony and the sale of indulgences to finance papal war. In 1412 he was excommunicated and exiled to South Bohemia.

At last, the Council of Konstanz assembled from 1414 to 1418 to decide the papal schism and to reassert church authority in the face of rising nationalism and reform movements. The council declared the teaching of John Wyclif to be heretical and also summoned Jan Hus to defend his orthodoxy. Hus willingly came to the council, hoping to explain himself and be restored to full communion. But instead of hearing him out, the council made him a prisoner and burned him at the stake.

Far from settling their problems with heresy, the council instead set a rebellion in motion. The rebels were known as Utraquists, after the Latin phrase *sub utraque specie*, meaning “in both forms,” meaning that they demanded to receive both the bread and the cup during the celebration of the Eucharist, a practice that Hus had affirmed. One of the results of the confirmation of the doctrine of transubstantiation

^[13] There are many detailed treatments available concerning Jan Hus and the events that followed his execution. The summary presented here is based chiefly on Murray L. Wagner, *Peter Chelčický, A Radical Separatist in Hussite Bohemia*, *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History* No. 25 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983), pp. 25-37 and Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia, A Czech History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 42-52.

^[14] Henry Prochazka, “Baptists in Czecho-Slovakia,” *Third Baptist World Congress*. July 21-27, 1923. *Record of Proceedings* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1923), p. 196.

had been an increased veneration of the elements of the mass to the extent that no one was allowed to drink from the chalice except priests for fear that the clumsy hands of the people might spill the Blood of Christ. The freedom to receive the cup was something about which all the widely differing factions of the Hussite rebellion were agreed. Thus, the uniting symbol of the Czech reformers became the chalice, an emblem featured even in their architecture. Typically, Baptist and other evangelical churches and organizations in Eastern Europe depict some form of an open Bible in their logos. However, the logo of the Czech Baptists—known since 1994 as the Unity of Brethren Baptists in the Czech Republic and the Unity of Brethren Baptists in the Slovak Republic—depicts a cross and a chalice.^[15]

During the ensuing two centuries theological issues became even more deeply entangled with political struggles. War against the papal and imperial armies eventually devolved into civil war. Here it is sufficient to note that there were serious divisions among the Hussites themselves. All were agreed on their desire to receive the cup, but some wished to rejoin Rome with no further demands and others wanted to press a moral reform program of both the church and society. There were also radical Hussites, sometimes called Taborites, after their geographical center on a hill they renamed after the mountain of Christ's Transfiguration. The radicals wanted to break entirely with Rome and "transfigure" both church and society by setting up an apocalyptic kingdom. At first their program was peaceful, but later many determined that it would be accomplished through military action.

Here the figure of Petr Chelčický (?1390–?1443) assumed significance. Little is known about the personal identity of this younger contemporary of Jan Hus.^[16] However, he was the key theologian of those Hussites—such as the Taborites—who envisioned a renewal of apostolic Christianity, which Murray Wagner defines as "... fellowship gathered out of the world through the uncoerced confessions of adult believers."^[17] Chelčický taught that Scripture is the only authority and affirmed the total separation of church and state. He believed that true Christians do not serve in public office, nor do they participate in the military. He anticipated that the lot of true Christians in the world would be suffering rather than triumph. He never rejected child baptism outright, but believed that baptismal candidates should be thoroughly taught, thus implying believers' baptism.^[18] A group called the Brethren formed around Petr Chelčický.

Chelčický is considered to have inspired a renewed separatist Hussite movement that was formally established in 1467, some twenty years after his death. It was called *Jednota bratrská*, that is, Union or Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas fratrum* in Latin), and represented a new Christian confession with its own priesthood and bishops. In its earlier phase, the *Jednota bratrská* was more closely connected with Chelčický's thinking and remained separate from the state and pacifist in its outlook. Later on the group's views moderated to permit members to hold public office and serve as soldiers.

^[15] That is, *Bratrská jednota baptistů*, see www.bjb.cz.

^[16] Wagner, *Petr Chelčický*, pp. 38-43.

^[17] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

The Unity of Brethren was never a majority confession, but according to Derek Sayer, its “intellectual impact was considerable both at the time and... on later historical memory. Tomáš Masaryk [1850–1937], president of the first republic, among others, was to see the moral heritage of the Brethren as lying at the very heart of Czech identity.”^[19] The “intellectual impact, moral heritage, and Czech identity” of the Brethren is surely due in part to the group’s faithfulness during times of repression. In addition, although the Brethren were more Christian practitioners than systematic theologians, they maintained an interest in education and printed the first vernacular Bible, the Bible kralická (classic third edition, 1613). When the Hapsburg emperor Ferdinand II (ruled 1619–1637) defeated the Czech Protestant uprising at Bílá hora (White Mountain, 1620) a harsh Jesuit-led program of re-Catholicization was instituted and many of the Brethren were exiled. One of the most famous of these was the theologian and educator, Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius, 1592–1670), who was to be the last Brethren bishop. Many years later a remnant of the Unity of the Brethren found refuge on the estate of Count Nikolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760). Better known as the Moravian Brethren, they were part of the Pietist movement that so greatly influenced modern evangelicalism.

Hussite history was never forgotten, but it became less a part of church history and more a part of national history as time went on. The process accelerated in the late eighteenth century among the increasingly restless subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The study of Czech history during the nineteenth century was dominated by František Palacký (1798–1876), who published the multi-volume *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia*. Palacký wrote that his work was intended to help his “beloved nation... recognize itself as in a mirror and regain consciousness of what it needs.”^[20] “Regaining consciousness” was the task of the *buditelé*, or “awakeners,” some of whom were not above forging historical documents on occasion to bolster their cause.^[21] Czech history, whether fictionalized or not, was, in turn, popularized in novels and plays and was further impressed on people’s imaginations through historical paintings, the greatest example being *Slav Epic* (*Slovanská epeje*) by Alfons Mucha (1860–1939), a cycle of twenty enormous paintings that took eighteen years to complete. Six of the canvases illustrate Hussite themes.^[22] The Hussite movement was interpreted by Palacký and others “both as a struggle for religious freedom and as an assertion of Czech nationality in the ‘age old’ conflict of Slavs and Germans...”^[23] Mary Heimann dismisses the process as “anachronistic,” as events “... emptied of contemporary religious meaning, became stories about the nation’s ‘struggle’...”^[24]

^[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

^[19] Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 43.

^[20] F. Palacký, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě*, 6 vols. (Prague: Kvasnička a Hampl, 1939), vol. 1, vii, quoted by Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia, A Czech History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 128.

^[21] Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, pp. 144–147.

^[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20, 130–133, 152.

^[23] *Ibid.*, p. 134.

^[24] Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 2–3.

Certainly the pivotal figure of Jan Hus was offered some curiously incongruous tributes in consequence of the historical revival. For example, a small box of stones, supposed to have been taken from the cell where Hus was imprisoned in Konstanz was placed in the foundation of the National Theater.^[25]

A crucial moment, of course, arrived when the new nation-state of Czechoslovakia emerged as one of the main outcomes of the First World War. All non-Catholic confessions had been suppressed since 1620, contributing to an anti-clerical attitude and a tendency to secularization.^[26] An edict of toleration in 1781 by Emperor Josef II (co-ruler with Maria Theresa from 1765, ruled alone 1780–1790) permitted Lutherans and Reformed to practice their faith openly in Austria. Now, however, in the new nation, an intensely anti-imperial and therefore anti-Catholic mood prevailed. The Baptist World Alliance report of 1923 mentioned the “numerous secessions” from Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches in Czechoslovakia, which they stated had contributed directly to the formation in 1920 of a “semi-Protestant” national church^[27] (Československá církev). Although it remained relatively small, this church was regarded as a continuation of the Hussite movement. Even before the new national church appeared, however, it had become important to all Protestant groups to identify themselves with the Hussites, and especially with the long disestablished Unity of the Brethren. Thus, already in 1918 Lutherans and Reformed had joined together to form the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren. For their part, the Czech Baptists identified themselves with Petr Chelčický. As one Czech Baptist leader wrote, with Chelčický in mind, “There were always in Czechoslovakia some people who held Baptist principles.”^[28] They proudly recalled that many Anabaptists, notably Balthasar Hubmaier (1485–1528) found a refuge in Moravia during the sixteenth century.^[29]

The first modern Baptist congregations in Bohemia had been formed in the 1880s. Previously, at least one of them had called itself the Congregation of Christians Baptized in Faith. But by the time of independence, the name changed. In 1919 fifteen Baptist congregations formed an association named Chelčický Unity of Brethren, changed later to Chelčický Unity of Brethren Baptists. Thus, the Hussite legacy was reenergized as a new generation of believers identified themselves with it. In his speech to the Baptist World Alliance gathering in Stockholm in 1923, a Czech representative, Henry Prochazka, called attention to the high moral standard and freedom-loving nature of the Bohemian Reformation, declaring that, “The basis of our Reformation is the ideal of humanity. Brotherhood was at the same time a name and our ideal of our national Church of Bohemian Brethren.” He even concluded

^[25] Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, p. 142.

^[26] Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Glasgow: William Collins' Sons & Co., 1975), p. 191.

^[27] W. T. Whitley, ed., *Third Baptist World Congress. July 21-27, 1923. Record of Proceedings* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1923), p. 89.

^[28] Joseph Novotny, *The Baptist Romance in the Heart of Europe (Czechoslovakia)*, (n.p.: Czechoslovak Baptist Convention in America and Canada, 1939), p. 66.

^[29] Prochazka, “Baptists in Czecho-Slovakia,” p. 196; Novotny, *Baptist Romance*, p. 66.

enthusiastically, “... the genius of the Czecho-Slovak people in its very being is Baptistic.”^[30]

It is not known when I. S. Prokhanov decided to pursue ordination through the Czechoslovak Baptists. He himself wrote that he had been considering a visit to Czechoslovakia “for a long time.”^[31] An obvious point of contact was at the 1923 Baptist World Alliance Congress in Stockholm.^[32] It is interesting that Prokhanov’s participation in the congress took place just after he had spent three months in prison. He was arrested because of an appeal he published in 1922 calling on Christians in Russia and throughout the world to refuse to participate in war. In prison he was persuaded to retract his pacifist statement and sign a new one calling for believers to be good citizens and support the Red Army. Freedom to travel to the Stockholm gathering was part of the transaction. During the meetings the Soviet delegates tried to persuade the worldwide Baptist community to accept a universal pacifist statement, but without success.^[33] Perhaps one reason Prokhanov was interested in the Hussites was the complexity of their relationship to war and peace.

Doubtless Prokhanov also wished to be associated with the confidence of the Czechoslovak Baptists in their own historical origins. Not only that, but by receiving ordination from them, he could identify himself and the Evangelical Christians with a respected and much older tradition. Furthermore, while that tradition was not Russian, it was not unintelligible. He acknowledged in his 1924 articles that because Hus and Chelčický were fellow Slavs his study of their accomplishments was necessarily accompanied by a “particular feeling.” Obviously he was delighted that he could read their writings in the original with only a little effort.^[34] Prokhanov also associated Hus with the triumph of the “religious, political, and scientific freedom” that he so admired. In particular, Prokhanov noted the new freedom the Czechs enjoyed to practice their faith and evangelize after centuries of Catholic domination.^[35] He compared the bonfire that consumed the Czech reformer with the legend of the phoenix that emerges alive from flames, asserting that from it “there began to be born a new, transformed Europe” free of “dogmatic papal despotism, the Inquisition... and obscurantism.”^[36] The revolutions of 1917 had also brought a measure of religious freedom to the Russian evangelicals, but as Prokhanov’s recent experience in prison demonstrated, that freedom was being called into question.

Above all, however, Prokhanov wanted to impart something of the spiritual importance of the Hussites to his readers, both for their edification and perhaps in anticipation of possible challenges to his ordination. Given that a connection had been formed through his ordination between the Evangelical Christians of Russia and the

^[30] Prochazka, “Baptists in Czecho-Slovakia,” pp. 197-198.

^[31] I. S. P., “Na rodine Iana Gusa,” p. 23.

^[32] Third Baptist World Congress lists Joseph Novotny among the fifteen Czechoslovak representatives (p. 236) and “J. S. Prokhanoff, Petrograd,” as one of forty Soviet delegates (pp. 251-252).

^[33] Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, pp. 191-192.

^[34] I. S. P., “Na rodine Iana Gusa,” pp. 6-7.

^[35] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

^[36] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

heirs of the Hussites in Czechoslovakia, it was important that the Russians become familiar with the Czechs. Knowing that his readers would be skeptical of anything that savored of the veneration of saints, Prokhanov assured them that spiritual lessons were, indeed, to be had in the study of the lives of faithful Christians.^[37] In addition, he asked the question that Russian evangelicals were bound to ask, “To what extent at that time was Hus himself aware of the gospel truth?” While Prokhanov admits that there were some things that Hus probably did not grasp, the essentials were there. He quoted Hus to demonstrate that the latter preached justification by faith well before Luther. Furthermore, Prokhanov asserted that Hus had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.^[38] In short, according to Prokhanov, “... in the person of Jan Hus, who lived 500 years ago, we have a great fellow campaigner (spodvizhnik) for the same EVANGELICAL FAITH that is so dear to us in the present day!”^[39]

Prokhanov went on to outline nine spiritual lessons drawn from the life of Hus.^[40] Frequently quoting from Hus’s writings, he called attention to his attitude of constant prayer and spirit of self-sacrifice, his holy Christian life, and love for others. Above all, Hus demonstrated how a Christian should regard the truth. Here Prokhanov quoted the well-known passage that is also part of the monument to Hus in the center of Prague that was dedicated in 1915: “Seek the truth; listen to the truth; teach the truth; love the truth; speak the truth; defend the truth, even unto death.”^[41] Finally, Prokhanov demonstrated that Hus’s writings show believers how to follow after their leader, Jesus Christ: wholeheartedly, seeking to imitate him in all things.

As for Chelčický, Prokhanov proclaimed him the first thinker to express the ideas that laid the groundwork for the evangelical movement among the Hussites. Prokhanov called him the founder of an “uncompromised Christian community.” Whereas Hus and his direct followers preached the restoration of primitive Christianity, it was up to Chelčický to give practical expression to those ideals.^[42] There was much about Chelčický for a Russian evangelical to admire. Prokhanov stressed that other reform movements in Europe were corrupted by their association with the government and soon “...if they did not quite die spiritually, they definitely cooled off.”^[43] In contrast, the Chelčický Brethren remained independent of the state and preserved the purity of apostolic Christianity. In addition, Prokhanov stated that admission to both the Czech Brethren and the Chelčický Brethren (which he understood to be a more rigorous circle within the broader community of Czech Brethren) was accomplished through baptism upon profession of faith—the first systematic instance of that practice in Europe since apostolic times. Furthermore, unlike Hus, Chelčický firmly rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, Purgatory, the veneration of saints, and “excess rituals.”^[44] Chelčický preached that Christians should live by farming and crafts,

^[37] Ibid., p. 9.

^[38] Ibid., p. 8.

^[39] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

^[40] Ibid., pp. 9-15.

^[41] Ibid., p. 14.

^[42] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

^[43] Ibid., p. 16.

and that social distinctions should be obliterated from the community—teachings that surely would appeal to Prokhanov, who was extremely active during the 1920s encouraging the organization of Christian economic communities.^[45] Prokhanov summed up, “It is impossible not to see in the work of Petr Chelický the stamp of the Holy Spirit, who in the midst of modest outward circumstances accomplishes great work in the inner spiritual world of humanity.”^[46]

Prokhanov concluded his articles on the Hussite movement with the claim that “... Chelický and Hus together truly laid the foundation of that Evangelical Christianity which, over the course of 500 years has produced great religious movements in the West, and in our time has continued in the Evangelical Christianity developing in Russia. **HERE THERE IS THE FULLEST [measure of] SPIRITUAL SUCCESSION.**”^[47] In other words, although Prokhanov did not refer directly to his ordination in these articles, he hinted at its spiritual, rather than its direct historical origin. He continued, drawing on the image of a bonfire such as the one that consumed Jan Hus:

As sparks fly for a long distance from a physical bonfire, so also the truths stated by Hus based on the teachings of Christ have flown to all corners of the earth. First of all these ideas spread to Germany, Poland, then through Germany to Holland and England, and after that these spiritual sparks flew to our country, although here there is no need to look for physical, historical connections.^[48]

Thus, the legacy of the Hussites was an important part of religious identity for Baptists in Czechoslovakia and remains so in the Czech Republic and Slovakia even today. Ivan Prokhanov represents another Christian tradition that located at least a part of its identity among the Hussites. It was with a touch of pride that Prokhanov noted that a century before Luther, fellow Slavs had already launched a reformation. Not only that, but Prokhanov asserted that the purity of the movement had been maintained—the Unity of the Brethren was not only centered on the authority of Scripture, but also ostensibly had held to its principles more reliably than other Protestant confessions for five-hundred years.

^[44] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

^[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18. For a description of Russian evangelicals and economic communities, see Mary E. Raber, “Ministries of Compassion among Russian Evangelicals, 1905-1929,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Wales/IBTS, 2014), pp. 196-225.

^[46] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

^[47] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

^[48] *Ibid.*