

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Prairie Flower: A Biography of the Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical  
Christians in Benito, Manitoba from 1928 to 1996

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE STUDIES IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

CALGARY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER, 2010

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Russian-Ukrainian community of Evangelical Christians existed in the village of Benito, Manitoba from 1928 until 1996. The community chose to identify as a Russian-Ukrainian one, although members of Ukrainian origin predominated at any given time throughout the life of the church. The church also chose to be a part of the Slavic Evangelical Union in Canada rather than to join stronger Ukrainian- or English-speaking Protestant organizations. The main reason for that was that the Evangelical Christians in the diaspora, including those of Benito, were an inalienable part of the larger tradition of religious dissent shared by many peoples of the former Russian Empire.

The movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians emerged in the 1870-ies in St. Petersburg and soon spread throughout the Russian Empire. It flourished under the able leadership of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869-1935). The movement turned into a transnational phenomenon present in over twenty countries following the demise of the empire in 1917. Canada became home to thousands of Slavic Evangelical Christians who arrived in this country between the early 1900s and the late 1940s. Slavic Evangelical migratory experience possessed a high degree of religious significance for the settlers and is best understood as biblical wandering toward the “New Jerusalem,” a physical place where religious, political, social, and economic ideals converge.

Slavic Evangelical Christians were an evangelical Protestant group. They were non-exclusive and ecumenically-minded movement with a special emphasis on a wholesale regeneration of the nation. Their focus upon non-denominationalism, a loose non-hierarchical structure, and a belief in the providential significance of Russia and the Slavic lands in the coming worldwide spiritual regeneration made them a distinct

religious denomination in spite of theological and practical similarities with such Christian groups as Baptists, Mennonites, or Disciples of Christ.

Although the Benito community generally evolved along the lines, common to other religious communities in the Canadian Prairies, its fate ultimately depended upon the success or failure of the transnational Slavic Evangelical Christian project. The decline of the movement of Evangelical Christians worldwide was the primary cause of the decline of the church, coupled by other factors, such as assimilation and rural depopulation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, my thanks are due to my academic advisor Dr. Douglas H. Shantz. Without his brilliant expertise, his unceasing willingness to help, teach, and discuss, and his guidance throughout the years of my post-graduate studies this thesis would have never been written. I can wholeheartedly say that I had the best advisor a doctoral student can possibly dream of.

The idea to conduct a study of Slavic Evangelicals in Manitoba first emerged in a conversation with a long-time friend of mine, Mr. Vladislav Petrusovich of Linden, Manitoba. A native of Russia and a member of the Mennonite church, Mr. Petrusovich has a deep personal interest in the history and heritage of the Slavic Evangelicals. He kindly accompanied me on all my study trips to Benito and the area and provided me with a number of relevant books, articles, photos, and ideas.

Thanks go to Mr. Jonathan Kalmakoff, a Doukhobor historian of Regina, Saskatchewan, who has helped me with his good advice and his impressive knowledge of the history of the early Russian and Slavic pioneers in the Canadian Prairies.

I'm deeply thankful to a number of people who provided me with assistance or hospitality on my field trips to Manitoba and Saskatchewan, among them Andreas Rahn and family, Nikolai Afanasyev, and the members of the Kamsack Doukhobor meeting. I'm very grateful to the University of Calgary for financing my field research and related trips.

My thanks are due to Rachel LeBlanc, Undergraduate Program Administrator at the Department of Religious Studies. Without her consistent kind help I would have had a much harder time working on this thesis.

I would like to thank my wife Anna Petrova and my daughters Daria and Arina for their continued support during the years of my doctoral studies. Their love, patience and genuine interest in my research were instrumental in my work.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank those former members of the Benito congregation and their neighbours and friends who shared their personal and family memories with me and showed me their hospitality and involvement on more than one occasion. This thesis is a memorial in their honour and in honour of their parents, their village, and their church home.

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## Introduction

This work is devoted to Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada, a group of settlers who once constituted an important stream of religious immigration to this country along with such larger and better known communities of Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors.<sup>1</sup> Slavic Evangelical Christians, in their majority ethnic Ukrainians, started to populate Canada in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their immigration to Canada continued at varying pace throughout the first half of the last century, reaching its peak between the late 1920s and late 1940s. Most Slavic Evangelicals settled in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, although communities also existed in Ontario and British Columbia. With the virtual stop of any immigration from the USSR after WWII, because of rapid assimilation, and, especially, due to a profound ideological crisis of the movement, communities of Slavic Evangelicals in Canada entered a period of decline which resulted in the disintegration of most Slavic Evangelical churches by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The author took an interest in the topic when he first learnt about the Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians in the small town of Benito in Manitoba, about 400 kilometres to the north-west of Winnipeg. The author stumbled upon such questions as why it was a *Russian-Ukrainian* church in a province where Ukrainians outnumber Russians at least 8 to 1<sup>2</sup> and where Ukrainians and Russians usually have had

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<sup>1</sup> On the three other groups and their relationship with the Canadian government see William Janzen, *Limits on liberty: the experience of Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> According to the 1996 census available at the Statistics Canada website at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/c1996-r1996/feb17-17fev/oe1man-eo1man-eng.htm> (URL accessed June 15, 2009)

separate ethnic organizations. Next, the question arose as to why it was a community of *Evangelical Christians* in a province where most other Ukrainian Protestants were Baptists. A suggestion inevitably came to mind that these two facts might have something to do with each other. Finally, the question remained as to why the church, once hundreds of members strong, ceased to exist, and how, if at all, its disintegration was connected with the first two facts. This thesis is an earnest attempt to find plausible answers to these questions.

### **Who Are “Slavic Evangelical Christians”?**

Although, generally speaking, any “born-again” Christians would be commonly labelled as Evangelicals within the North American context, this term has a very specific meaning for the purposes of this thesis. By Evangelical Christians we understand members or affiliates of the movement of *evangel'skie khristiane*, followers of Vasilii Aleksandrovich Pashkov (1833-1902), sometimes called Pashkovites, and later Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869-1935). This movement first emerged in the North-Western part of the Russian Empire (particularly the city of St. Petersburg) in the 1860s, and later, especially under the leadership of Prokhanov, spread throughout the Empire. The movement was brought to Russia by a Western, namely, British, preacher and had a considerable following among the aristocracy in St. Petersburg in 1870s.<sup>3</sup> From that geographical and cultural milieu the movement spread to other areas of the northwest of the empire (including modern Eastern Poland, Western Ukraine and Belorussia). The

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Andrew Blane “Protestant Sects in Late Imperial Russia,” in *The Religious World of Russian Culture* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 268-303, and Edmund Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy 1860-1900. Radstockism and Pashkovism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), esp. 30-56.

Evangelical revival in the northwest chronologically coincided with “Stundist”<sup>4</sup> and “Baptist” revivals in two other geographical locations across Russia – what is now central and southern Ukraine (Stundism), and Caucasus (Baptist faith).<sup>5</sup> Due to emigration, both pre-Revolutionary, and after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, as well as following the independence of Poland (1918), the Slavic Evangelical movement became a global phenomenon, present in many countries from Canada to Argentina and from Germany to China.<sup>6</sup>

Ivan Prokhanov managed and co-ordinated activities of this diasporic church from Berlin until his death in 1935. In the USSR the Union of Evangelical Christians, following a brief period of relative religious freedom in the 1920s, was reduced to a precarious existence in the 1930s by the Stalinist government, and then forced to unite into one church with the Baptists and other smaller Protestant denominations in 1944.<sup>7</sup> Outside the USSR Evangelical Christians endured for many decades following the Russian Revolution as a separate brotherhood of unions and churches with their own organizational and theological principles and a distinct understanding of their mission. Wherever they were found, an ethnic component was of crucial importance for Slavic Evangelical Christians. This included, but was not limited to, using heritage languages in the meeting, and a special dedication to missionary and relief work among Slavic peoples in the diaspora and in the old country. Theological principles of Slavic Evangelical

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<sup>4</sup> This name derives from the German word *Stunde* – “the [prayer] hour.” First Ukrainian Evangelicals either attended German prayer meetings in nearby colonies or modeled their own meetings after the German example.

<sup>5</sup> On the genesis of the three movements see, for example, the excellent dissertation by Samuel John Nedsoly, “Evangelical Sectarianism in Russia” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion. Ivan Stepanovic Prochanov (1869-1935) und der Weg der Evangeliumschristen und Baptisten* (Oncken Verlag: Wuppertal und Kassel, 1978), 275-319.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener ON, Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1981), 49.

Christians included baptism of believing adults, strictly Arminian theology, and a rather informal leadership pattern. At the same time Slavic Evangelical Christians upheld such basic Protestant teachings as the principle of *sola Scriptura*, priesthood of all believers, salvation through faith by grace, and a simple worship devoid of imagery and elaborate ceremonies.

Ivan Prokhanov led the Union of Evangelical Christians both in and outside of Russia (and later USSR) from 1908 till his death in 1935. During this time he enjoyed unrivalled authority among the members of the movement he led. His personality was singular, his scope of activities highly impressive, and his talents multifaceted. This, however, naturally raises the question to what extent the messianic vision for the Slavic Evangelical Union and far-fetching hopes expressed by Prokhanov were shared or understood by rank and file members of his community. To find a plausible answer to the latter question is important in order to establish whether the difference between Slavic Evangelical Christians and other Protestants, particularly Slavic and non-Slavic Baptists lies in comparatively minor theological and organizational details, in the distinct church philosophy and vision, or in the authoritarian and charismatic ambitions of Ivan Prokhanov.

This thesis intends to prove that Evangelical Christians had their very own, unique vision of their role in Russian and world Christianity that differed on some important points from the Baptists who were a local branch of the greater Baptist family of churches. Many Baptists, especially outside Russia, perceived the Union of Evangelical Christians as another stream of the Baptist movement. Indeed, Ivan Prokhanov was elected (in absentia) Vice-President of the newly established Baptist

World Alliance (BWA) in 1911 and remained in that position until 1928. Representatives of the Evangelical Christians regularly participated in BWA activities. At the same time Prokhanov and other leaders of Evangelical Christians had similar contacts with other evangelical Christian churches in the West, such as the Disciples of Christ, always maintaining the organizational independence and an essentially interdenominational character of their brotherhood.

Appreciation of the following facts will help to better explain the difference between Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians than purely theological (relatively minor) disagreements or the controversial personality of Prokhanov. Evangelical Christians refrained from a direct affiliation with Western Protestant churches even after Prokhanov's death in 1935. Evangelical Christians in the diaspora have acquired characteristics of an ethno-confessional community. The Union of Evangelical Christians maintained officially, even in the midst of a demographic and ideological crisis, as late as 1980s, a self image of their movement as a seed of a worldwide fellowship of Evangelical Christians, and as a ferment of a more successful and complete worldwide Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Evangelical Christians were decidedly non-sectarian and extraordinarily open to interdenominational co-operation.

The idea of deepening the Reformation and reaching beyond its historic achievements is not original *per se*. In the European context Pietists promoted similar goals of Christian unity and a renewed Christian commitment since late 17<sup>th</sup> century. “The renewal of *doctrine* achieved in the sixteenth century would be completed by a

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<sup>8</sup> Liudvig Shenderovskii, *Evangel'skie Khristiane. Vozrozhdennoe evangel'skoe dvizhenie v istoricheskoi khristianskoi tserkvi (Evangelical Christians. The Re-born Evangelical Movement Within the Historical Christian Church)* (Toronto: Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians, 1980), 393-94.

renewal of *life* marked by Christian unity and brotherly love.”<sup>9</sup> However, the ideas of a more complete Reformation, championed by the Evangelical Christian movement, were new within the Russian context.

Normally movements of a messianic nature that declare far-reaching goals tend to enter a phase of decline following their evident failure to fulfill or live up to their declared aims. Sooner or later they faced what Joseph Zygmunt defined as “ideological crisis born of prophetic failure.”<sup>10</sup> It is hard to resist a temptation to equate the death of Prokhanov with the ideological crisis. However, in spite of the enormous significance of his personality for the movement at large, the decline of a worldwide numerous and dynamic community cannot be sufficiently explained with that fact alone. Rather, it was only one of the factors that chronologically preceded other important events such as the merger of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR in 1944, annexation of Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia by the USSR in 1939 and the establishment of Communist regimes in most of post-war Eastern and Central Europe. These events destroyed the Slavic Evangelical community network in that part of the world, and produced a transnational effect on Slavic Evangelical communities, affecting negatively the vitality of the communities physically distant from the epicentre. Further, Slavic Evangelical Christians in the diaspora were devoid of their main and natural support base in Russia and Ukraine due to the political realities of the Iron Curtain epoch. They also lacked the support of Western Christians because of the non-affiliated denominational status of Slavic Evangelicals, which set them apart from otherwise theologically very

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas H. Shantz, *Between Sardis and Philadelphia. The Life and World of Pietist Court Preacher Conrad Bröske* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), xv.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph F. Zygmunt “When Prophecies Fail. A Theoretical Perspective on the Comparative Evidence” in Jon R. Stone, ed. *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 87.

similar North American or European Baptist churches. This, as the present thesis will argue, was one of the main reasons of the weakening and dwindling of the Slavic Evangelical movement outside Russia or the former USSR, while such factors as assimilation or the loss of a heritage language were external indicators of what can in a sense be called the effect of a failed prophecy.

Prokhanov projected the movement he headed as a dawn of a new, more complete Reformation, which would begin from Russia or Slavic people in the diaspora, and spread globally, uniting Christians, and converting the unsaved.<sup>11</sup> Russia remained almost completely untouched by the European Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This does not mean, however, that the idea of a Reformation is foreign to Russian religious thought. Sergei Zhuk called Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century radical religious dissent (of which he considered Stundists a part) “Russia’s lost Reformation.”<sup>12</sup> Although we strongly disagree with him on the heavy emphasis he placed on the communities of the “Israelites” (or *shaloputy*) as a main ferment of this lost Reformation, the underlying notion of both reform as a concept and the Reformation as a historical phenomenon was the moving force behind the Slavic Evangelical movement. Charles Taylor aptly demonstrated and analysed the crucial significance of the inherent need for a reform as an integral part of the process of secularization. He wrote: “An age or society would then be secular or not, in virtue of the

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<sup>11</sup> See Ivan Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia 1869-1933. Autobiography of I.S. Prokhanoff* (New York: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 1933), 254-255: “Reformers who arose at the end of the Middle Ages strove mightily to re-create among their people the original pattern of the Christian Church... Unfortunately the churches of the Reformation came to a dead stop all too soon... The All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians conceives its mission and task to be the re-creation of early Christianity upon earth in all its creative power, and, closely associated with this, the spiritual and moral rebirth of the individual, of the family, of society, of the people, and of all mankind.”

<sup>12</sup> See Sergei Zhuk, *Russia’s Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual.”<sup>13</sup> Religion first became the matter of a free choice in Russia only in 1905. Of course, the October Manifesto promulgated in that year<sup>14</sup> was not the beginning of the secularization process, but it was an indicator of the preparedness of the Russian society as a whole, “to be aware that there is more than one option [of religion and attitude towards religion].”<sup>15</sup> The official recognition of this fact was a product of a long history of complex religious and political developments in Russia at the turn of the century. This tacit and continuous process, this dawn of “a secular age” in Russia bears, in our opinion, certain resemblance (if not in form, then in spirit) to the European Protestant Reformation. Evangelical Christians were among the most active and dedicated partakers of this process.

Slavic Evangelical Christians were also an integral, albeit tiny, part of the overall experience of Canadian Protestantism and, particularly, evangelicalism. Recent studies of Canadian evangelicals indicated that immigrant, “ethnic” churches were a significant aspect of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Canadian evangelicalism.<sup>16</sup> In its development, the Canadian branch of Slavic Evangelical Christians generally followed the pattern, common for other evangelicals in the country. Parallel developments included the Bible school movement, especially in the Prairies, transdenominational awareness and joint initiatives in the sphere of home and foreign mission, Christian radio broadcasting, and a peak of membership and church activities in the 1940s and 1950s.

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>14</sup> On the Manifesto and its effect upon religious minorities in Russia see Paul Werth, “Toward ‘Freedom of Conscience’: Catholicism, Law, and the Contours of Religious Liberty in Late Imperial Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Volume 7, Number 4 (Fall 2006): 843-863.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce L. Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 369-70.

## **A Case Study: The Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians in Benito, Manitoba**

The thesis is focused upon a particular group of Evangelical Christians in Canada, the Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical Church in the village of Benito, Manitoba. It is distinctive and unique for a variety of reasons. First of all, as an immigrant group, its members, along with a sense of identity derived from their religion, were distinct from the majority of Canadians ethnically, culturally, and linguistically. Second, it is remarkable because members of the Benito church were not only a minority compared to the population around them, they were a minority within their own respective larger ethnic groups, for the vast majority of Russian Canadians at the time the church was organized were either Doukhobor or Russian Orthodox, and the bulk of Ukrainian Canadians were either Ukrainian Orthodox or Ukrainian Catholic. Third, the Benito church was unique in the sense that it was a joint church home for a few Slavic ethnicities (along with Ukrainians and Russians there were Belorussians), which is quite atypical for Slavic diasporas, especially in Canada. Usually, in spite of obvious linguistic and cultural affinity, each ethnicity tends to build its own cultural, educational and religious institutions which we can observe in Canada. Therefore, the people who were part of the Benito church were an ethno-religious group, who, similar to Mennonites, “possessed both a religious and an ethnic identity.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, the Benito church is unique case study because this remote rural community was once one of the largest Slavic Evangelical churches in Canada, both in terms of membership and in terms of influence. At the peak,

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<sup>17</sup> Royden Loewen, “Ethnicity and Religion among Canada’s Mennonites” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, 331.

in the 1950s its activities included radio broadcasting, a Bible Institute, and regular evangelization events in the district and beyond.

Canada, particularly its Prairie Provinces, was among the most popular immigration destinations for Slavic Evangelical Christians in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada were ethnic Ukrainians. Of course, Ukrainian Evangelical Christians comprised only a tiny portion of all Canadian Ukrainians, and even a small minority among Canadian Ukrainian Protestants. However, a unique feature of these Evangelical Christians was that they preferred a broad identification with the Slavic (or, often, Russian-Ukrainian) community to an exclusively Ukrainian self-identification. The present thesis will demonstrate that the movement of Evangelical Christians has been an outstanding example of intentional, voluntary, peaceful, productive and long-lasting co-operation between Ukrainians and Russians in Canada untouched by political agendas and nationalism.

Comparative study of different immigrant religious groups, according to Royden Loewen, “illuminates characteristics shared by all farm immigrant groups.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, as he further notices, “such studies are rare.” The case of the Slavic Evangelical believers in the Prairie Provinces as a whole, and that of the Benito congregation in particular, presents a perfect opportunity to compare them to their neighbours in order to “understand the dynamic exchange between inherited immigrant cultures and the new social realities associated with modernization.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Royden Loewen, *Hidden Worlds. Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>19</sup> Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 91.

## **Purpose and Arguments**

One of the purposes of the research is to establish Slavic Evangelical immigration as a separate instance of religious immigration into Canada along with such groups as Hutterites, Mennonites, and Doukhobors. Its size (over 10,000 members Canada wide during its peak in 1945-55) also allows us to consider it among mentioned three communities. The three groups are widely recognized in the scholarship and in public opinion as important streams of religiously motivated early settlers that helped to shape the cultural and religious mosaic of Western Canada. This thesis argues that Slavic Evangelicals are another group of essentially the same sort. What certainly makes Evangelicals distinct (and less known) as compared to the three mentioned groups (especially Doukhobors and Hutterites) is a lack of conflict associated with their immigration, resettlement and life in Canada.

In regards to the Benito Russian-Ukrainian church in particular, this thesis argues that the choice to identify with the Slavic Evangelical movement and employ the term “Russian-Ukrainian” as the official name of the church had a deep significance. This, in fact, pointed to a historical, cultural, and spiritual bond between the members, ethnic Ukrainians and Polish nationals, and the Evangelical movement, which emerged in Saint-Petersburg in 1860s, and spread throughout the Empire, absorbing and uniting smaller currents of religious dissent on East Slavic lands. In other words, the main reason for the inclusion of the word “Russian” in the name of the church did not refer to the ethnicity, for Ukrainians comprised the absolute majority of the membership of the church at any given time in its history, but, rather, underlined its historical and spiritual lineage. In fact, the worldwide movement of which the Benito church was a part have used “The World

Fellowship of *Slavic Evangelical Christians*” as their official name. Therefore, instead of employing such narrow ethnic qualifiers as Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, or “Russian-Ukrainian,” Slavic Evangelical Christians will be generally used in this thesis in reference to the wider movement and to the members of the Benito church both as a religious and an ethnic designation. A special mention must be made on the difference between the capital “E” Evangelical Christians, used in this research as a proper name of the movement, and small “e” evangelicals, denoting a broader transnational strand in Christianity, of which Slavic Evangelical Christians were a part.<sup>20</sup>

This thesis will examine ways of integration of Slavic Evangelicals into Canadian society, and the reasons why the process of integration was so much smoother than that of Anabaptist (Mennonite and Hutterite) communities and, particularly, the Doukhobors. This work will be dealing with how the place and stance of Slavic Evangelicals were negotiated both within the Canadian society at large and within larger Ukrainian and Russian communities in Canada. The movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians fitted well into the Canadian evangelical mainstream, which facilitated the integration of the community into Canadian life, and, conversely, contributed to a decline of the movement as a distinct ethno-religious group.<sup>21</sup>

Slavic Evangelical Christians may be regarded within the broader context of eastern European, Slavic, Ukrainian or Russian immigration into Canada. Nevertheless,

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<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this research the “quadruple” definition of evangelicalism suggested by David Bebbington, is used. See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-3. According to Bebbington, evangelicalism rests upon conversionism, Biblicism, activism, and crucicentrism. The position of Slavic Evangelicals in relation to North American evangelicalism will be considered in detail in Chapter VII.

<sup>21</sup> Compare with Mennonite Brethren and their accelerated acculturation under the influence of evangelicalism, see Bruce Guenther, “Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites” in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 229-231.

their distinct identity was rooted in religion, and their migratory experiences were, thus, significantly influenced by religious ideas. These experiences for Slavic Evangelical Christians were, in a sense, a pursuit of New Jerusalem, understood broadly as a search for a physical location where Christian religious ideals converge with political reality.<sup>22</sup> Many of them saw in their new country a realization of a desire for a “godly” political order, where their religious beliefs were no longer a pretext for mistreatment or discrimination. They saw their newly found liberty and prosperity, in religious terms, as a gift from God. At the same time, the very process of seeking out the land of freedom (which for some of the settlers turned to be a thorny path) was akin to the biblical wandering in search of a heavenly city.

This thesis is also an attempt to document and preserve the history, memoirs and cultural heritage of the Benito Evangelical Church and its members. The present research will contribute a new element to the spectrum of the Canadian multicultural society. The unique culture of Slavic Evangelical immigrants in a backwater district of Manitoba is nearly extinct now, and it may be completely gone if not preserved and documented promptly.

### **A Note on Transliteration of Personal and Geographical Names**

Transliteration of Ukrainian and Russian personal names, geographical names, titles of books and periodicals with the exception of the most commonly used ones (Moscow, Kiev, Belorussia etc.) usually follows ALA-LC Romanization tables approved

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<sup>22</sup> On immigration to the Canadian Prairies as a religious experience see *Visions of the New Jerusalem.*, ed. Benjamin G. Smillie, (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), and Anthony Rasporich, “Utopia, Sect and Millennium in Western Canada 1870-1940” in *Prophets, Priests, and Prodigals: Readings in Canadian Religious History*, Mark G. McGowan and David Marshall eds., (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 213-240.

by the Library of Congress and the American Library Association.<sup>23</sup> In rare cases more than one spelling of the same name may be used if sources provide different variants of spelling. For example, the same last name may be spelled either as Guk based upon its pronunciation in Russian, or as Huk, since some of the written sources reflect the Ukrainian/Belorussian pronunciation. The last name Prokhanov (Rus. *Проханов*) is spelled Prokhanoff in all footnote references to Prokhanov's *Autobiography*, because it appeared with a double "f" on that publication in English.

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<sup>23</sup> *ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts* (Library of Congress, 1997).

## Chapter I. Literature, Sources, and Methodology

The movement of Evangelical Christians emerged in the 1870s in north-western Russia, particularly in St. Petersburg under the direct influence of Western preachers. However, in all probability communities of Bible-based believers that identified themselves as Evangelical Christians, but not linked directly to the Saint-Petersburg centre existed in various parts of the country even prior to the 1870s.<sup>1</sup> The Union of Evangelical Christians was formally established by their prominent leader Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov in 1909. Later it spread throughout Russia, and gained a large number of converts in what was then the Russian part of Poland (presently the eastern part of Poland, Western Belorussia, and Western Ukraine), mostly ethnic East Slavs (Ukrainians and Belorussians). The latter, due to mass immigration, comprised the bulk of Slavic Evangelical settlers in Canada in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Consequently, the literature about the Evangelical movement was written in various languages, and bears traces of diverse influences. Much of the literature used for this research was written in the Russian language. However, due to the numerical significance and, in some cases (e.g. Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada) prevalence of ethnic Ukrainians, books, articles and other pieces in the Ukrainian language were of high importance. A high degree of attention paid to the emerging Russian Evangelical movement by European (especially British and German) and North American Protestants led to the appearance of various books on Russian Evangelicals in English and German from as early as 1900s. This acute interest continued into the post-Revolutionary years,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of Unofficial Religion in Russia* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 111.

with an added political anti-Communist aspect. A significant part of the literature discussed below can be classified as either outright confessional, usually written by Russian, Ukrainian and Western Protestants, or confessionally biased. Political agendas and their influence on the subject of this research is another problem this chapter will deal with. Finally, we will discuss the use of oral history, and other sources, such as visual ones.

### **Evangelical Christians in the Scholarly Discourse and Confessional Literature**

Being a movement of Western origin, supported and nurtured by kindred religious groups in North America, Great Britain, Germany, and elsewhere, Slavic Protestantism (comprised mostly, though not exclusively, by Baptists and Evangelical Christians) enjoyed a considerable degree of attention in the West. Although most of the earliest (before the Russian Revolution of 1917) books on the subject were written from the confessional viewpoint, they represent an important source of information about the early period of the movement. A notable fact to consider as we start reviewing English language literature is that most of it was penned by Baptist authors. These latter usually considered Evangelical Christians as part of the Baptist movement, and were not particularly interested in understanding the difference between the two branches. Later, in the diaspora, Slavic Evangelicals, unlike Baptists, have always remained an ethnic church which left them somewhat marginalised in the West as compared with their Baptist counterparts and resulted in their being ignored as a separate group in the public and scholarly discourse.

A British author Robert Sloan Latimer wrote extensively on the subject in 1908 to 1910. His *Dr. Baedeker and His Apostolic Work in Russia, Under Three Tsars*, and *With Christ in Russia*<sup>2</sup> discussed “the historical genesis and the extensive sweep of the present most interesting movement [Evangelical awakening in Russia] in the religious life of this great people” as well as “scenes that took place under my own eyes.” Latimer’s work is a good example of the high quality confessional literature about emerging Russian Evangelicalism and attests to the interest Western Baptists took in it. Another Baptist author who likewise was a witness of the growing Evangelical movement in Russia was Charles T. Byford, who served as a Continental Commissioner of the Baptist World Alliance in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His *Peasants and Prophets*<sup>3</sup> is devoted to native Baptist pioneers in Russia and south-eastern Europe (Hungary, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria). These two authors genuinely endeavoured to be objective, but their stance was clearly denominational. Byford viewed Evangelical Christians as “free Baptists.”<sup>4</sup> A more academic approach to the subject was undertaken by Rev. James Henry Rushbrooke, a British writer, pastor, and the President of the World Baptist Alliance in 1939-1947, who devoted much effort to post-WWI relief work. His *Some Chapters of European Baptist History*<sup>5</sup> allocated a chapter to the Baptists in Russia and the USSR. Rushbrooke recognized the Evangelical Christians as an “independent movement,” that gradually became “Baptist in doctrine and polity,” in spite of a separate leadership and

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Sloan Latimer, *Dr. Baedeker and His Apostolic Work in Russia* (Morgan & Scott Ltd., London, 1908); *Under Three Tsars: Liberty of Conscience in Russia, 1856-1909* (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909); *With Christ in Russia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

<sup>3</sup> Charles T. Byford, *Peasants and Prophets (Baptists Pioneers in Russia and South-Eastern Europe)* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1912).

<sup>4</sup> Byford, *Peasants and Prophets*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> James Henry Rushbrooke, *Some Chapters of European Baptist History* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1929).

organization.<sup>6</sup> For Rushbrooke, Prokhanov was a highly gifted, but, perhaps, too self-centred personality. From this perspective, Prokhanov's position as Vice-President within the Baptist World Alliance from 1911 to 1928 could be regarded as an advance made to Prokhanov in the hope that he would join forces with the Russian Baptists. All three authors (as nearly all other Baptist authors who touched on the subject) regarded Evangelical Christians as merely a branch of the Baptists.

Post-revolutionary Western literature on the subject was often devoted to the fate of Christianity, including its Protestant branches, in the Soviet state with its officially atheistic ideology. Denominational literature, both academic and popular, from that time on and for many decades to come almost entirely concentrated upon stories of persecution or mistreatment of believers in the USSR, humanitarian concerns, human rights activism, in some cases efforts to facilitate emigration of Protestant believers from the USSR. Taking into account the isolation of the USSR from the Western world and the political climate of the time, the whole subject of Soviet Christians soon became highly mythologized. Touching and romantic stories about brave martyrs for their faith and strong fighters for Christ against the "diabolically evil" state served the psychological needs of Western believers. The latter could feel proud of partaking (by praying, donating, signing petitions etc.) in the right cause, and had their own faith reaffirmed by knowing that Christians were suffering at the hands of the godless somewhere in a vast far-away land. Using the situation with religious freedom in the USSR (which, of course, had been far from satisfactory for the most of the Soviet period) as a political gun on the battlefields of the Cold War did little service to the objectivity of the treatment of the subject in Western denominational literature of the Soviet period. The level of

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<sup>6</sup> Rushbrooke, *Some Chapters*, 94.

misinterpretation, exaggeration, and personal bias, the amount of improvable, dubious facts, and outright fake stories in the denominational non-academic Western literature on Soviet Evangelicals was so high that, in spite of its tremendous volume, this sort of literature is of very little use for this research.<sup>7</sup>

Academic literature on Russian and Soviet Evangelicals of the period frequently suffered the handicap of being too speculative. Due to the governmental restrictions and the political isolation of the USSR, scholars did not have the opportunity to conduct archival research or field work in the USSR. Therefore, scholars often needed to depend upon outdated information or communication that was hard to verify. For instance, Michael Bourdeaux in his *Religious Ferment in Russia*<sup>8</sup> acknowledged that he could not vouch for the accuracy of numerous passages of his book, and suggested that certain documents might be deemed genuine since “the authenticity of no single one has... ever been challenged by the Soviet authorities.”<sup>9</sup> The latter statement leaves a reader wondering whether the author is serious in taking the judgement of Soviet authorities on religious issues (or the lack thereof) as a proof of authenticity. Political agendas also claimed their toll on the scholarship of the period, and in some cases scholarship and politics became very closely intertwined with one another. The activities of the famous Keston Institute, a UK-based centre for the study of religion in the “Communist lands”

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, the story of Sergei Kourdakov, a Soviet seaman granted political asylum in Canada in 1971, who claimed to have been a former persecutor of underground believers turned Christian, was investigated by a US Christian activist and educator Caroline Walker. Initially Walker tried to find additional information on Sergei Kourdakov whom he had admired as a hero of faith, and other characters of Kourdakov’s book *The Persecutor* (Fleming H. Ravel Company, 1973). Contrary to her expectations, she found out that much of Kourdakov’s story was false. In 2004 Walker produced a documentary *Forgive Me, Sergei* (<http://www.forgivemesergei.com>, URL valid as of June 24, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia. Protestant Opposition to the Soviet Religious Policy* (London: McMillan & Co., 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia*, x-xi.

are a good example of the latter.<sup>10</sup> Bourdeaux in his *Opium of the People*<sup>11</sup> describes in detail how vicious the Soviet regime was and how it set out from the very beginning to destroy religion. Unprecedented for Evangelicals, religious liberties granted by the Lenin's government after the Revolution that lasted for about a decade, apparently did not fit the story and were left out of the narrative. Bourdeaux wrote that "the amazing thing was that he [leader of Evangelical Christians Ivan Prokhanov] persuaded the Communist authorities to let him found Evangel'sk [The City of Gospel, an intentional religious commune]... Prokhanov's project was to make his first commune a Christian model which the rest of the Soviet Union would wish to follow."<sup>12</sup> It sounds as if the Prokhanov's project were something unique and outstanding, while in the 1920s in the USSR, hundreds of Christian communal projects, farms, and settlements existed legally throughout the country. Representatives of the Soviet authorities even participated in the inauguration ceremony of the City of Gospel.<sup>13</sup> The question remains whether the author was not aware of such a basic fact or chose to omit it intentionally. The Keston Institute has produced a tremendous corpus of publications on Protestants in Russia. However, in spite of its rich informative basis, this sort of literature has to be used with extreme caution due to its obvious political bias. A useful piece of advice was given by Walter Sawatsky: "one of the rules of thumb followed by respected scholars... was to compare sources - official, samizdat, western reports - and to generate the most plausible account,

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<sup>10</sup> The official website of the Keston Institute is available at the following address: <http://www.keston.org.uk/index.php> (URL accurate as of June 14, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Opium of the People. The Christian Religion in the USSR* (Indianapolis, Kansas City, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Bourdeaux, *Opium of the People*, 152.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, ON, Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 37.

thereby also learning to differentiate more reliable scholarship... from the outright tendentious.”<sup>14</sup>

Another type of a confessional history is what we can safely call the official history of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR (and modern Russia). As was mentioned, both denominations were made to unite in 1944 by the Stalinist government. Some leaders of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists were even returned from exile or released from prisons or labour camps to be able to participate in a unification congress. The government apparently found it easier to keep one recognized large Evangelical union under surveillance than two separate brotherhoods or a number of illegal independent groups or small denominations. Besides, the Soviet government of the time strove to demonstrate to the world, including its war-time allies, that religious freedoms were honoured in the USSR. Consequently, the official viewpoint of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB) founded in 1944 has been that two branches had always sought to unite, and that the unification act of 1944 was a providential event that brought the unification dream to its fulfillment. An example of the history supporting this view is *Istoriia Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR (The History of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the USSR)*<sup>15</sup> published in 1989 by the AUCECB.

In contrast is the autobiography by Ivan Prokhanov entitled *In the Cauldron of Russia (V russkom kotle)*.<sup>16</sup> The book, published in English in 1933 in New York, is a powerful example of a spiritual autobiography and an important historical testimony on

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Sawatsky, Review of *Russian Baptists & Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929*, by Heather Coleman, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XXVI, 3 (August 2006): 60.

<sup>15</sup> *Istoriia Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR* (Moscow: VSEKhB, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Ivan Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia. 1869-1933. Autobiography of I.S. Prokhanoff* (New York: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 1933).

the Evangelical movement both in Russia and beyond. However, from the vantage point of the present research the most remarkable facts are the following. Baptists and the Russian Baptist Union were hardly at all mentioned in the autobiography. This calls for an explanation, since Prokhanov had been Vice-President of the World Baptist Alliance from 1911 to 1928. Prokhanov described in detail his vision for the Evangelical movement, its role within the worldwide Christendom, emphasized the spirit of co-operation between Christians everywhere in spite of their denomination.

The reluctance on behalf of Prokhanov to acknowledge his involvement with the Baptists church in Russia and internationally has two plausible (and overlapping) explanations. On one hand, this may be interpreted as a reflection of Prokhanov's own strong-willed and self-centred personality, intolerant to the leadership (or competition) of others. Since Prokhanov staked on his own independent union, where he was the unquestionable head, it could have been in his best interest to conceal or downplay his own Baptist past and his long-standing relationship with the Baptists. On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that this position suggests that Prokhanov's involvement with the Baptists was no more than an expression of an interdenominational character of the Slavic Evangelical movement, and that Prokhanov saw it that way. Indeed, as we shall see, the Prokhanovite church simultaneously sought and welcomed co-operation and involvement with denominations other than Baptists, such as the Disciples of Christ, the fact not reflected in his Autobiography, either.

This identifies a crucial point in the scholarship on the Baptists and Evangelicals Christians, namely, the question whether the two branches should be classified as one denomination or not, and, if not, what the difference between them was. Andrew Blane, a

U.S. scholar and the author of a number of publications on Russian religiosity, argued that “although a complex of... factors frustrated organic union of the two major divisions of the Protestant sects [Baptists and Evangelical Christians in Russia], it is still sound to view them as a single movement.”<sup>17</sup> It may be plausible to consider them as a single body considering the later history of the two movements in the USSR where they eventually merged into one denomination and generally have endured as a united religious body until now.<sup>18</sup> However it is less plausible from the vantage point of this research, which covers the Evangelical Christians in the diaspora. According to Blane, one can consider both groups as one because, firstly because “The Baptist World Alliance... recognized them as one,” and, secondly, “most significant of all, the Tsarist government considered them to be a single movement and treated them accordingly.”<sup>19</sup> The Baptist World Alliance was only formed in 1903 as a broad umbrella organization, and, apparently, was primarily concerned with supporting believers in Russia under its aegis, rather than with discerning who within emerging Russian Protestantism represented which denomination and why. Steve Durasoff, an émigré Russian religious historian, who authored a number of publications on Pentecostalism, and was a Pentecostal believer himself, wrote in his *The Russian Protestants*, that “Rushbrooke, one of the presidents of the World Baptist Alliance declared that both Russian unions were known abroad as Baptists; the difference of names was attributed to their independent origins.”<sup>20</sup> Even though Baptists abroad might have disregarded the difference between the two unions, the “independent origins”

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Blane, “Protestant Sects in Late Imperial Russia,” in Andrew Blane, ed., *The Religious World of Russian Culture*, 2 vols., (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 2:292

<sup>18</sup> The Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians was resurrected in 1992 at a Conference in Moscow. Yet, most local churches preferred to remain within the Evangelical-Baptist Union.

<sup>19</sup> Blane, *Protestant Sects*, 293.

<sup>20</sup> Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), 55.

was an important enough issue. Further, the two branches not only originated independently, but existed independently until 1944 in the USSR, and until, at least, early 21<sup>st</sup> century outside the USSR. We need to remember, though, that from the point of view of Prokhanov, with his openness towards like-minded believers, his participation in the major Christian conference with unity and co-operation on its agenda made perfect sense and did not necessarily imply that he considered himself a Baptist.

The fact that the Tsarist government treated Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians as one body does not mean much. The government (and the dominant Orthodox church) was only interested in either suppressing “sectarians” or keeping them under control, and not in an academic study of religious dissent and its proper classification. It is enough to mention that the derogatory name of *khlysty* (Flagellants, members of the old Russian clandestine ecstatic sect that emerged in 17<sup>th</sup> century) was indiscriminately applied both by Tsarist and church officials to any dissent movement with a charismatic component. This was done in order to accuse religious dissidents of sexual indecency and horrific worship practices (such as self-flagellation and human sacrifices) that were traditionally ascribed to the *khlysty*.<sup>21</sup> Even when attempts to classify “sects” were earnest and genuinely objective, they rarely went far beyond a mechanistic and simplistic division based upon externals, such as “mystical” and “rationalist” sects.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted, though, that Western scholars of the period who wrote about religious dissent in Russia, often did not fare any better. For example, Frederick Connybeare in his

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<sup>21</sup> On the *khlysty* (also known as *Khristovshchina*, Flagellants, Christ-faith, or God’s People) see John Eugene Clay, “Russian Peasant Religion and Its Repression: The Christ-Faith (*Khristovshchina*) and the Origins of the ‘Flagellant’ Myth, 1666-1837” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> A good example of such rather meaningless classification is otherwise very informative *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov (A Review of Russian Sects and Their Branches)* by a professor of Orthodox theology and protopriest Timofei Butkevich (Kharkov: Tipografiia gubernskago pravleniia, 1910).

once classical *Russian Dissenters*, divided sects into 1) the Old Believers of Great Russia, 2) the Spiritual Christians of South Russia (including Baptists!), and 3) the Mystics.<sup>23</sup>

Connybeare, who wrote his book from 1914 to 1917, when Evangelical Protestants already were one of the biggest sectarian movements in the country, devoted little space to Russian Protestants and did not classify them as a separate branch of religious dissent at all! No wonder that he did not even mention Evangelical Christians.

Thus, in order to understand if, where, and to what extent Baptists were similar to or different from Evangelical Christians, one should be very careful when taking into account preconceived views and traditional myths, whether they were produced or upheld by the Tsarist Russian government, the World Baptist Alliance, or the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB).

Another important, albeit somewhat outdated, authority on the Russian non-conformity, the émigré Russian scholar Serge Bolshakoff, got much closer to the point. He pointed out that “Prokhanov did not wish to work in the Russian Baptist Union. He believed that their very name, Baptists, was alien to the Russian people. Besides, Prokhanov was unable to accept the rigid views of the Russian Baptists. In that he was very similar to Vladimir Soloviev, who, although nominally a Roman Catholic *was in reality an independent thinker...* Prokhanov and Soloviev, Russian Protestant and Russian Catholic, were *very unlike their Western coreligionists and were in a way heretical.*”<sup>24</sup> Both men met, and personal relationship between Prokhanov and Soloviev is an interesting topic in itself.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Frederick Connybeare, *Russian Dissenters* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1962), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, 118.

<sup>25</sup> On Vladimir Soloviev see, for example, Jonathan Sutton, *The religious philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: towards a reassessment* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

Some of the authors of the period testified to substantial distinctions between two major branches of Protestantism in Russia. An Orthodox archpriest and anti-sectarian missionary A. Iunitskii, mentioned in 1895 that in 1880s Baptists of the city of Baku had an active correspondence with Pashkov, an early leader of Evangelical Christians in St. Petersburg, and predecessor of Ivan Prokhanov. The correspondence ended up in a disagreement between Pashkov and the Baptists over the question of open (upheld by Evangelical Christians) versus closed (practised by Baptists) communion.<sup>26</sup> Both facts, the existence of an active contact, and its final failure are eloquent enough and, in our opinion, represent graphically the dialectics of the relationship between Slavic Baptists and Evangelical Christians.

Paul Steeves, the author of a 1976 dissertation on the Russian Baptist Union, and a scholar of Russian religion, followed suit in considering the Evangelical Christians as a side branch of the broader Baptist movement.<sup>27</sup> His more recent scholarship seems to hold to the same position. For instance, within the context of the military draft issue and Russian Baptists in 1920s Evangelical Christians were referred to only once as a “kindred-spirited Union of Evangelical Christians.”<sup>28</sup>

One of the most thoroughly researched books on the Slavic Evangelical movement to date is *Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion* (*Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union*)<sup>29</sup> by the German church

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<sup>26</sup> A. Iunitskii, “Sektantskie gnezda na Kavkaze (Sectarian Nests in the Caucasus),” *Khristianskoe Chtenie* Vol 1 (1895), 158.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Steeves, “Evangelical Awakening in Russia. The Russian Baptist Union, 1917-1935” (PhD. diss., University of Kansas, 1976).

<sup>28</sup> Paul Steeves, “Russian Baptists and the Military Question, 1918-1929” in *Challenge to Mars: Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*, P. Brock, T. Socknat, eds. (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 21.

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion (Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union)*. (Oncken Verlag: Wuppertal und Kassel, 1978).

historian Wilhelm Kahle. The book, however, focused upon the figure and personality of Ivan Prokhanov and his influence on the Evangelical Christians, and did not examine the Slavic Evangelical movement beyond Prokhanov's death. Kahle pointed to the virtual impossibility of any union between Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians while Prokhanov with his charisma and strong leadership was the head of the latter. Kahle also emphasised on the importance of the heritage of the Molokans and other Spiritual Christians for Prokhanov and his followers.

Walter Sawatsky, reviewing the history of the Russian Evangelicals, pointed out that “due to the influence of the Plymouth Brethren, the Pashkovites [predecessors of Prokhanov and his Union] did not ordain leaders, baptize, or maintain membership rolls,”<sup>30</sup> differences that went far beyond closed or open communion, and would represent a tangible barrier between Baptists and the Pashkovites. To this one can add that this attitude towards externals was characteristic not only of the Plymouth Brethren, but also of Russian Spiritual Christians, Molokans and Doukhobors. Sawatsky was very accurate in describing the history of unification attempts of Baptists and Evangelical Christians as quite complicated. He specifically indicated that Baptists were the ones who took a more inflexible stance in the unification negotiations than the Evangelical Christians.

Heather Coleman, a Canadian researcher of Russian Baptists, continues in the tradition of Andrew Blane and others who preferred to consider Evangelical Christians as “the other branch of the movement.”<sup>31</sup> What is truly important and relevant for the present research is Coleman's evaluation of the Baptist and Evangelical Christian

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<sup>30</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 27.

movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as “the Spiritual Revolution.” Here we come very close to whence the inner strength of the movement came. In the words of Charles Taylor, “this drive to Reform was the matrix out of which the modern European idea of Revolution emerges.”<sup>32</sup> We argue that one of the keys to the correct understanding of Evangelical Christians is their commitment to comprehensive reform (and Reformation) in Russia and worldwide, first spiritual, and then social, economical, and political.

Yurii Reshetnikov, a Ukrainian scholar, and an active member of the Evangelical-Baptist church, produced in 2000 a dissertation on the Evangelical and Baptist movement in Ukraine. The dissertation was widely based upon archival documents and pieces of oral history. His stance on the problem of the differentiation between Baptists and Evangelical Christians is very simplistic. He believes that the main (if not the only) difference between the former and the latter was that Baptists followed the teaching of Particular Baptists on predestination, while Evangelical Christians adopted the Arminian doctrine of the General Baptists.<sup>33</sup> Even though this observation may be true, we intend to show that the distinctions went far beyond this specific doctrinal issue, and had a more fundamental character.

Tat’iana Nikol’skaia authored a comprehensive review of Russian Protestantism in relation to the state from the enactment of religious toleration policy in the Russian Empire in 1905 until the end of the Soviet period in 1991.<sup>34</sup> The book by Nikol’skaia is,

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<sup>32</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 61.

<sup>33</sup> Yurii Evhenovych Reshetnikov, *Stanovlennia ta diferentsiatsia evanhel’s’koho rukhu v Ukraini (The Emergence and Differentiation of the Evangelical Movement in Ukraine)* (Candidate of Sciences diss., G.S. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, 2000), Chapter 3.2.

<sup>34</sup> Tat’iana Nikol’skaia, *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast’ v 1905-1991 godakh (Russian Protestantism and State Power 1905-1991)* (Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel’stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta, 2009).

undoubtedly, one of the most comprehensive academic studies on the topic. Her book is devoted to the “traditional” branches of the Russian Protestantism, which include Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day Adventists. Nikol’skaia did not specifically address the issue of the relationship between Evangelical Christians and Baptists, but in her analysis, which sequentially looked at one Protestant branch after another, she consistently treated Evangelical Christians and Baptists as two distinct denominations until their unification in 1944. She admitted that their fusion in 1944 was achieved in defiance of the very basic principles of congregational democracy and accountability common for both branches, and under the tight control of the Soviet authorities.<sup>35</sup> She explained the perseverance of the union thereafter pointing to the “doctrinal closeness” of both movements, and, most importantly, to their “moral preparedness” to unite in the 1940s, after “the change of generations”. Apparently, moral preparedness paved the road to a durable unification in the USSR, where both churches were weakened and intimidated by the Stalinist terror. At the same time, the church of Slavic Evangelical Christians outside the USSR, which developed under different social and political circumstances, endured as a separate denomination at least until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Now, it is impossible to deny the great degree of similarity, both theological and practical, between Slavic Baptists and Evangelical Christians. The continuous co-operation between Evangelical Christians and Baptists even when they represented two separate denominations is also beyond any doubt. Finally, the church of Evangelical Christian-Baptists would not have been a viable union if the difference between its two main branches had been insuperable. Yet, to realize this difference, its reasons and

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<sup>35</sup> Nikol’skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 139.

consequences for both denominations, is the key point to understanding the fate of the Slavic Evangelic movement globally, including on the Canadian Prairies.

### **Sources and Literature on Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada**

Works on the history of the Baptist church in Canada sometimes cover “ethnic” Baptist churches. For instance, Joseph Harris in his historical essay on Western Canadian Baptists dedicated to the centennial anniversary of Baptist beginnings in the region devoted a chapter to “ethnic churches.” One section of the chapter (only a few pages long) told the story of Ukrainian Baptists in the Prairie Provinces. It is worth noting that Harris mentioned “a few Russian Baptists known as Stundists”<sup>36</sup> who lived in villages or on farms near Dauphin and Emerson in Manitoba even prior to beginning of the mass immigration of Galician (from the Western part of present-day Ukraine) Ukrainians to Canada. Those Stundists provided help to the English-speaking Baptists when the latter decided to make contact with Ukrainian newcomers in order to proselytize among them. It is important to understand that Slavic Baptists in Western Canada, at least in the beginning stage (end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) were largely a product of the missionary work under the aegis of local (English-speaking) Baptists. At the same time there were Slavic settlers who came to Canada already being Evangelical believers, often primarily due to religious reasons (persecutions in the home country, to avoid military service, etc.) and maintained independent communities.

Jonathan Kalmakoff, a Regina-based Doukhobor historian, genealogist, and a webmaster of a very informative Doukhobor Genealogy website, authored an article

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Edwin Harris, *The Baptist Union of Western Canada. A Centennial History 1873-1973* (Saint John, N.B.: Lingley Printing Co., 1976), 185-190.

about the Doukhobor resettlement near the small town of Hyas in Saskatchewan. He said that as of 1904 “other groups [of settlers alongside the Doukhobors] included... Russian and Ukrainian Evangelical Protestants who, like the Doukhobors, fled Tsarist Russia to avoid religious persecution... The two groups of settlers, being able to converse in their native language, remained on friendly terms, visited one another’s homes and engaged in lively philosophical discussions.”<sup>37</sup> In all probability, here Kalmakoff described the people and the milieu that soon was to become the basis for the Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada while the direct mission work of established Baptist churches among Galician newcomers, in turn, provided a basis for the Ukrainian Baptist Unions in Canada. Symptomatically, Kalmakoff, not being involved with the Baptists, did not refer to those “Evangelical Protestants” as Baptists (apparently because there was no evidence that they called themselves that name) while Harris, a Baptist author, named the early “Stundist” settlers Baptists, in the traditional fashion of most Baptist authors, both Western or Russian and Ukrainian.

A chapter in a recent book on Ukrainian and Belorussian peasant migrants in Canada by Vadim Kukushkin is devoted to their religious life.<sup>38</sup> While correctly noting that most immigrants from the Russian Empire came to Canada in search of better life, and not because of persecutions, he mentioned that most early Slavic Baptist preachers in Canada “had been converted to the Baptist faith in the old country and had come to Canada to escape persecution.”<sup>39</sup> According to Kukushkin, Baptists were the only Protestants who were able to gain some following among Slavic immigrants, mainly because immigrants knew who Baptists were prior to their arrival in Canada. The Baptist mission among Slavs in Canada

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Kalmakoff, “The Hyas Doukhobor Settlement,” *Saskatchewan History* 59, 2 (Winter 2007). Also available online at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Hyas.htm> (URL accessed on 27 August 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Vadim Kukushkin, *From Peasants to Labourers: Ukrainian and Belarusan Immigration from the Russian Empire to Canada* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 152-62.

<sup>39</sup> Kukushkin, *From Peasants to Labourers*, 153.

enjoyed a steady financial and organizational support provided by Anglo-Canadian Baptists, although such support was at times exceedingly paternalistic. Kukushkin was seemingly unaware of Evangelical Christians as a Slavic religious movement distinct from Baptists and independent of aid and control by Anglo-Canadian religious denominations.

It should be noted that the abovementioned *History of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the USSR*, published by the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists treated Slavic Baptist and Evangelical Christian churches abroad in a concise, but very straightforward manner. *The History* mentioned in a very positive light the Worldwide Union of Evangelical Christians. It said that “this Union which unites the Slavs... from early 1960s... established and has since maintained the very best relations with the AUCECB.”<sup>40</sup> Of particular interest in this brief description is the recognition of the “Slavic,” that is, essentially inter-ethnic nature of the Union, and an indirect indication of the Union’s political neutrality. One should keep in mind that the early 1960s were marked by the increased intolerance towards religion in the USSR and the split within the AUCECB, when part of the Evangelical-Baptist church in the USSR preferred illegal existence to compliance to the Soviet legislation on religion which the separatist group believed to have been discriminatory.

Unlike their brethren in Russia or the USSR, Slavic Evangelicals or even Baptists in Canada never attracted any noticeable public or scholarly attention. For the general public they were just another immigrant group, while scholars generally did not see them as a significant phenomenon compared to Anabaptist or Doukhobor settlers. Slavic Evangelicals and Baptists in Canada produced some historical literature of their own striving to document their beginnings and history, and to make a statement regarding

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<sup>40</sup> *The History*, 308.

their goals, aspirations, and achievements. One of the earliest such books was *With Christ in America. A Story of Russian-Ukrainian Baptists*<sup>41</sup> written by Ivan A. Kmeta and published in 1948. Kmeta was a prominent leader of the Slavic Baptist movement in North America. He came to Canada in 1929 and served as a pastor in Manitoba and later in Los Angeles, California. Kmeta came from the Eastern part of Ukraine (Kharkov) and his approach was that of a close co-operation, and, whenever, possible, unity between Slavic believers. We can safely say that Ivan Kmeta represented the traditional “Stundist” standpoint, universalist and non-nationalistic at its core, and firmly rooted in the common experience of spiritual search, awakening, and suffering of Russians, Ukrainians, German Mennonites, and other peoples of the Russian Empire. Kmeta placed a short biography of Prokhanov in his book among life stories of other pioneers of the Russian Protestantism. However, this brief (one page long) biography was very critical. Prokhanov was specifically criticized for his independent stance in relation to the Russian Baptists. Kmeta said, “if he [Prokhanov] had kept the fellowship with the Baptists at home as he did with those abroad [a clear allusion to Prokhanov’s involvement with the in the World Baptist Alliance], perhaps greater things would have happened in that country instead of petty quarrels among believers.”<sup>42</sup> At the same time a few lines earlier Kmeta tacitly recognized that the vision, goals, plans and, indeed, the very underlying philosophy of Prokhanov’s movement was unique and independent. “Prokhanov... had a great vision for Russia. He dreamed of a reform that has had no precedent in history. He planned a new Evangelical economy, politics, and new Evangelical cities; in general, a new order of

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<sup>41</sup> Ivan A. Kmeta, *With Christ in America. A Story of Russian-Ukrainian Baptists* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1948).

<sup>42</sup> Kmeta, *With Christ in America*, 37.

life.”<sup>43</sup> Obviously, all this was way too exotic or utopian for the well-established, mainstream North American Baptist church and affiliated with it emerging Slavic Baptist communities.

Another attempt of the same sort was the book by another pioneer of the Slavic Baptist movement in Canada, Petro (Peter) Kindrat. His book was written in the Ukrainian language under the title *Ukrains'kyi baptysts'kyi rukh u Kanadi (The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada)*<sup>44</sup> and published in 1972. Kindrat was one of the initiators of a separate Ukrainian Baptist Union in Canada founded in 1921. Characteristically, Kindrat referred to the Slavic Evangelical Union in Canada (of which the Benito church was a part) as the “Russian brotherhood,”<sup>45</sup> although the Union was intentionally multi-ethnic and multi-lingual. Kindrat and his standpoint represented what may be called the ukrainophile approach.

Finally, an influx of politicised post-WWII Ukrainian emigrants and the beginning of the Cold War further influenced the position of some Ukrainian Protestants in Canada. As a result, new Ukrainian Protestant organizations were founded. Some of them exhibited strong political bias and tendencies that can be rightfully called russophobic. Promoters of this position tended to entirely separate the Ukrainian Evangelical movement from the Russian Evangelical movement by re-writing the history to fit their political and nationalistic agenda. For instance, Stephen Nischuk, founder and director of the Ukrainian Baptist Missionary Society of Detroit, Michigan in his pamphlet

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<sup>43</sup> Kmeta, *With Christ in America*, 37

<sup>44</sup> Petro Kindrat, *Ukrain'skyi Baptysts'kyi Rukh u Kanadi (Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada)* (Winnipeg, Toronto: Doroha Prawdy, 1972).

<sup>45</sup> Kindrat, *Ukrain'skyi Baptysts'kyi Rukh u Kanadi*, 72-73.

*Ukrainian Baptist Church*<sup>46</sup> completely ignored the shared history of the Evangelical movement in Russia and Ukraine. Soviet Communists (very many of whom in the USSR were, in fact, Ukrainians) were consistently referred to as “Russian Communists,” and even the Orthodox Church was referred to as “Russian Red Orthodoxy.” Little wonder that the USA, in its turn, was lauded as “our wonderful, great, and free United States of America.” Of course, there has never been any single or united “Ukrainian Baptist Church” as such, and Mr. Nischuk hardly had any right to speak on behalf of all Ukrainian Baptists whose political views varied greatly.

Even academic works on Ukrainian religious history such as *The History of Religious Thought in Ukraine* by Mykhailo Hrushevs’kyi<sup>47</sup> displayed this tendency to unceasingly affirm and accentuate differences between Ukraine and “Muscovite” Russia, carefully avoiding any mention of positive, peaceful, or mutually enriching interaction between two branches of the originally united ethnos.

Thus, we can identify three specific approaches towards their own history and roles within the Ukrainian Protestant Canadian community reflected in the literature they have produced. They are 1) traditionalist, which acknowledged shared origins and history with the Russian Protestantism, 2) ukrainophile, which emphasized the Ukrainian ethnic, linguistic and cultural aspects of their movement, and 3) russophobic, extremely politically laden that used their position within Ukrainian Baptist communities as a channel for expressing their political agenda and, often, ethnic prejudice. Among the factors that influenced the viewpoint of a specific author are their birthplace in the

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<sup>46</sup> Stephen Nischuk, *Ukrainian Baptist Church* (Detroit: The Ukrainian Baptist Mission, 1969).

<sup>47</sup> Mykhailo Hrushevs’kyi, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini* (Winnipeg, Munich, Detroit: Ukrainian Evangelical Alliance of North America, 1962).

Ukraine, the period when they left Ukraine, and, of course, their personal story and experiences.

The abovementioned diametrical divergence of opinions is characteristic of Baptist denominational literature. Books, pamphlets, and other writings produced by Evangelical Christians proper (a much smaller corpus of writings) appear to be to a great degree free of nationalistic or political biases. *Evangel'skie Khristiane (Evangelical Christians)*, a historical book by Evangelical pastor Liudvig Shenderovskii, published in Canada in 1980 is, as the author himself noted, the only full and comprehensive story of the Slavic Evangelical movement worldwide up to date. Rev. Shenderovskii was Polish; however he put a special emphasis on reaffirmation of the multi-ethnic character of the Union of Evangelical Christians and firmly stated that “domination of one ethnicity over another was discouraged.” It was published when the overall decline of the movement was already obvious. Naturally, the author could not but offer some kind of an explanation of the failure of the Slavic Evangelical movement. According to Shenderovskii, the main reason was the loss of the heritage languages by second and third generations of the Slavic Evangelicals and the virtual halt of the continuous influx of new Slavic immigrants. As we will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, this explanation is simplistic and, in fact, is a case of a misrepresentation of the cause and effect relationship.

Periodical publications of the Slavic Evangelical Christians of different time periods will provide an additional key to internal processes within the brotherhood, and will allow tracing the dynamics of these processes. Magazine *Khristianin (The Christian)* was published by the Prokhanovite Union of Evangelical Christians from 1906 to 1928 in

Russia and USSR. Prokhanov served as the magazine's editor-in-chief. The magazine was intended as a tribune for all like-minded Christians regardless of denomination. In 1928 it closed down under the increasing pressure of the Stalinist government. For the purposes of this research, *Khristianin* is a witness of the condition of Prokhanovite movement at the time just prior to the mass migrations of Evangelical Christians to North America, when the movement was headed by its charismatic leader and still enjoyed the degree of freedom in the USSR. *Evangel'skaia vera* (The Faith of the Gospel), the official periodical of Evangelical Christians outside the USSR, was published in 1931-1940 first in New York, then in Berlin, and finally, in Tallinn. This periodical was especially valuable for the present research, because it covered the period of the formation of the Slavic Evangelical church in the diaspora, including its Canadian branch, and, specifically, the community in Benito. Another periodical, *Evangel'skoe slovo* (The Word of Gospel) was published between 1962 and 1975 by the World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians, the heir of the Prokhanovite Union in the diaspora, headquartered in Chicago, USA. This magazine reflects the life of the worldwide brotherhood of Slavic Evangelical Christians during post-war years of peak and decline, when it was managed collegially by elected elders. The readership of *Evangel'skoe slovo* included Slavic Evangelical Christians from North America to Argentina, Uruguay, and Switzerland. Newspaper and magazine articles and other periodic publications of a non-scholarly nature pertaining to the history of Slavic Evangelicals worldwide will be used as needed.

There is only one book (only 67 pages long) produced by or about that Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical community in Benito. It is a bilingual (English and Ukrainian,

although only a portion of the English text is rendered in the Ukrainian) book *The Church in the Valley (Tserkva v seli)*,<sup>48</sup> designed and written as a collection of memories and old photos, a memorial to the church and its members when the community was in 1985 already on its way to disintegration. As the compiler, Lydia McKinnon, stated, “this book is compiled from the wealth of personal information and photographs contributed by a great many people. Approximately 250 people were contacted; about one-third replied.”<sup>49</sup> The book, as one could safely assume, was an accurate, but fairly cautious, story of the community, combining genuine heartfelt nostalgia and sympathy for the church and its people with silence about internal conflicts.

Slavic Evangelical immigration into Canada has never been a subject of any consistent scholarly analysis. In part it is due to the fact that Evangelical Ukrainians and Russians in Canada comprise a relatively small faction of Ukrainian Canadians and Russian Canadians. Although there exists a large corpus of academic works on Ukrainian immigration into Canada, including religious practices of Ukrainian immigrants,<sup>50</sup> authors generally tend to overlook Ukrainian Protestants. For instance, a book of articles presented at a major conference on religious practices of Ukrainian Canadians, did not contain a single piece on Ukrainian Evangelicals or Baptists out of over twenty articles.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, those Ukrainian Protestants who belonged to the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada are neglected even when Ukrainian Protestants are being discussed.

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<sup>48</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, Lydia McKinnon, compiler (Winnipeg, 1985).

<sup>49</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example Michael Ewanchuk, *Reflections and Reminiscences: Ukrainians in Canada (1892-1992)* (Winnipeg, 1995); Basil Rotoff et al. *Monuments to Faith: Ukrainian Churches in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1990); Parasias Iwanec, *Ukrainian Churches of Alberta: Retracing the Foot Paths of the Ukrainian Pioneers of Alberta* (Priashiv: Private Press, 1991), among others.

<sup>51</sup> See *The Ukrainian Religious Experience. Tradition and the Canadian Cultural Context*, David J. Goa, ed. (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989).

The main reason is that the Union was not a Ukrainian national organization; although ethnic Ukrainians comprised majority of Evangelical Christians in Canada, it united believers of many ethnic backgrounds, and never emphasized any particular ethnic component.

Canadian Ukrainian historiography of the broad subject of the religious history of Ukrainians and Canadian Ukrainians often exhibits certain limitations and biases caused by political reasons. Historically the vast majority of Ukrainian immigrants into Canada came from Western Ukraine, also known as Galicia. That part of the ancient Kievan Rus lost independence in the medieval period, and from that time on developed under Polish, Austro-Hungarian, Romanian, and other foreign powers, being completely torn apart from the rest of Ukraine and Russia in political, cultural, and religious aspects. This produced a sense of isolation, self-centredness, and a tendency among some Galician intelligentsia to perceive Galician identity, history, dialect, religious customs, and so on, as standard for “Ukrainian” in a broad sense.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, after incorporation of Galicia into the USSR in 1939, limitations of religious freedom, forced collectivization and other abuses of power committed by the Stalinist government, provoked further alienation of Western Ukrainians from what they now regarded as the “Muscovite intrusion” into their affairs and way of life. This tendency became especially strong after WWII with the influx of post-war Western Ukrainian immigrants. O. Gerus and J. Rea say in their *Ukrainians in Canada*: “The injection of these politicised and educated immigrants into Canada caused acute tensions within the established and overwhelmingly

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<sup>52</sup> See Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism: Galicia as Ukraine’s Piedmont* (Toronto-London-Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002). See also Barbara Skinner, *The Western Front of the Eastern Church: Uniate and Orthodox Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

Canadian-born Ukrainian community... Their nationalist arrogance and elitism and their determination to convert the established organized life to their own political purpose (the liberation of Ukraine) was one source of difficulty.”<sup>53</sup> Understanding the degree and character of political engagement on behalf of previous scholarship is an extremely important task for a researcher of Ukrainian and Russian religious history in Canada.

Early Canadian publications on immigration deserve special mention. Particularly valuable for this research proved to be James Woodworth’s work, analysing the specific contribution and comparative merits of each of the immigrant groups in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canada, including Galicians (western Ukrainians) and Doukhobors<sup>54</sup> from the point of view of a sympathetic, but rigorous Anglo-Canadian. James S. Woodsworth (1872-1942) was a Methodist minister and a Canadian political and social activist, one of the pioneers of the social democratic movement and the first leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Foundation.

It was necessary to position Slavic Evangelical Christians within the Canadian religious landscape. A collection of essays *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, edited by George Rawlyk has served as a key to a systematic understanding of Canadian Protestantism’s historical trajectory.<sup>55</sup> It provided a broad framework in which to discuss the story of the Benito church. Slavic Evangelical Christians were a small part of a larger kaleidoscope of Canadian evangelical Christianity. Of special importance for our analysis of the Slavic Evangelicals within the context of Canadian evangelicalism were recent

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<sup>53</sup> O.W. Gerus and J.E. Rea, *The Ukrainians in Canada* (Canadian Historical Association: Ottawa, 1985), 18.

<sup>54</sup> James S. Woodsworth, *The Strangers within Our Gates* (The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Canada, 1909).

<sup>55</sup> George A. Rawlyk, ed. *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997).

studies of Mennonites and evangelicalism, the Bible school movement, Baptist, Lutheran and Pentecostal evangelicalism.<sup>56</sup> The Benito church and the Slavic Evangelical movement in general evolved along the lines common for most other Canadian evangelicals. It was the sudden decline and disappearance of the movement that contrasted sharply with the “normal” course of events exhibited by other evangelical groups in the country. An explanation of this abnormality is one of the goals of this thesis.

The complex relationship of ethnic and the religious aspects has also come to the forefront of the Canadian history and sociology of religion. Recently published collection of articles edited by Paul Bramadat and David Seljak is indicative of the growing scholarly interest and relevance of this new perspective.<sup>57</sup> For the purposes of this study articles by Bruce Guenther on evangelicals and ethnicity, by Royden Loewen on Mennonites, and Mirosław Tataryn on eastern Christians will be of particular use.

Fundamental works on the Mennonite experience in Canada by Frank Epp<sup>58</sup> and Ted Regehr<sup>59</sup> are of special importance for this work due to the parallels one can draw between Mennonites and Slavic Evangelical Christians as two ethno-religious groups. The classical work on the Doukhobors by Woodcock and Avakumovic,<sup>60</sup> complemented

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<sup>56</sup> See in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), especially John G. Stackhouse, “Who Whom?: Evangelicalism and the Canadian Society,” Bruce Guenther, “Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites,” Robert K. Burkinshaw, “Evangelical Bible Colleges in Twentieth Century Canada.”

<sup>57</sup> *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), especially Bramadat and Seljak, “Charting the New Terrain: Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada,” Bruce Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada,” Mirosław Tataryn, “Canada’s Eastern Christians,” Royden Loewen, “Poetics of Peoplehood: Ethnicity and Religion among Canada’s Mennonites.”

<sup>58</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920. The History of a Separate People* (Toronto, Ont., Macmillan of Canada, 1974), and *The Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (MacMillan of Canada, 1982).

<sup>59</sup> Ted Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*. Vol. 3 of *Mennonites in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996)

<sup>60</sup> George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (The Carleton Library, 1977).

by the Doukhobor perspective of Koozma Tarasoff<sup>61</sup> and a historical geography study by Carl Tracy on the early Doukhobor settlement in Saskatchewan<sup>62</sup> have served as a basis for a comparison between Slavic Evangelicals and an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally akin Doukhobors who have been Benito's Evangelical Christians neighbours for a few generations.

### **Oral History and an Outline of Methodology**

In our opinion a researcher of a modern or a relatively recent historical, social or religious phenomenon should always seek personal contact with its participants or observers. As Harriet Nathan put it, "it is remarkable that such a simple event, with one person asking questions and one answering can produce such wide-ranging experiences."<sup>63</sup> Unlike those scholars who are by necessity limited to archival, archaeological or other posthumous data, a researcher of immigrant religion in Western Canada in many cases has a fortunate advantage of an interactive and live contact with the subject of his or her studies. Personal interviews may be supported by such informal evidence as surviving personal correspondence, autobiographies, personal diaries, recordings, songs, tales, anecdotes, and photos.

The role oral and other informal history plays in understanding mass religious immigration into Western Canada is extremely important. In the words of Gerald Friesen,

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<sup>61</sup> See Koozma Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (Saskatoon: Mir Publication Society, 1982), *Spirit Wrestlers: Centennial Papers in Honour of Canada's Doukhobor Heritage*, Koozma J. Tarasoff and Robert B. Klymasz, eds. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1995), "The Western Settlement of Canadian Doukhobors" in *Visions of the New Jerusalem. Religious Settlement on the Prairies*, Benjamin G. Smillie, ed. (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983).

<sup>62</sup> Carl J. Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996).

<sup>63</sup> Harriet Nathan, *Critical Choices in Interviews. Conduct, Use, and Research Role* (University of California, Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1986), 2.

“Canada’s history has often been told from the vantage point of those who possess the resources that we recognize as power – wealth, military authority, political influence.”<sup>64</sup> This is now changing, and the voices of the powerless are now being heard. Lately this fact has been increasingly recognized and appreciated by scholars. Royden Loewen carefully examined the value of Mennonite personal diaries in his book *From the Inside Out*,<sup>65</sup> while Julie Rak attested to the importance of Doukhobor autobiography as a witness narrative.<sup>66</sup> Koozma Tarasoff relied primarily upon personal interviews while working on his research on Russian immigrant societies in Greater Vancouver area,<sup>67</sup> and John Woodsworth used correspondence as his principal source on reconstructing Doukhobor immigration to Canada.<sup>68</sup> A researcher of the Slavic Evangelical communities in the Prairies is in a particularly advantageous position. Due to the fact that Evangelical Christians are relatively late newcomers, it is still possible to find and establish contact with those who were brought to Canada in their young years by their parents, and with many second generation settlers.

The author of the present thesis was able to conduct field work in Benito, Swan River and adjacent areas of Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 2006-2009. As a result interviews with seven former members of the Benito church, their descendants and other local residents were recorded (comprising about a dozen files with sound recordings). These recordings provide a basis for the history of the Benito congregation. Besides, the field work allowed collecting other relevant items, such as photos, artefacts, sound

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<sup>64</sup> Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication and Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>65</sup> Royden Loewen, *From the Inside Out* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Julie Rak, “Doukhobor Autobiography As Witness Narrative.” *Biography* 24.1 (2001): 226-241.

<sup>67</sup> Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Spells, Splits, and Survival in a Russian Canadian Community: A Study of Russian Organizations in the Greater Vancouver Area* (New York: AMS Press, 1988).

<sup>68</sup> John Woodsworth, ed. and trans., *Russian Roots & Canadian Wings: Russian Archival Documents on the Doukhobor Emigration to Canada* (Toronto: Penumbra Press, 1999).

recordings, and publications or their copies. Last, but not least, field work helped the present author to get a feeling of the place, its landscape, landmarks, environment, and people which, is no less important than any written sources or scholarly books.

Alessandro Portelli's work and methodology were especially instrumental in dealing with the interviews. Data received as a result of interviews, are always, as noted Alessandro Portelli, "always has an unfinished nature of a work in progress" due to its inherent incompleteness.<sup>69</sup> The informants interviewed in the course of this research, represent only a small part of those who could possibly tell their own story of the Benito church. Moreover, the same informants might have told the story differently at a different time or under different circumstances. All interviews, although conducted in three languages, English, Russian, and Ukrainian (or, sometimes, in a mix of these languages), were rendered in English, which in itself is a major distortion of the original. A conscious effort was made to convey the emotional background of interviews and the circumstances of the interviewing process. Trust and confidence is another matter in a relationship between the informant and the interviewers.<sup>70</sup> The degree of trust is very difficult to assess objectively for an interviewer who is himself or herself a part of the process. All interviews conducted for this study took place in a comfortable setting, yet the author readily acknowledges the line that naturally existed between his informants and himself due to differences of age, background, occupation, among many others.

The author made an earnest attempt to keep in mind limitations, or, rather, peculiarities, of interviews as a source of information when assessing them. To what extent this attempt was successful, is up to the reader. Yet, in our judgement, for the story

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<sup>69</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop*, 12 (Autumn, 1981): 104.

<sup>70</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "History-Telling and Time: An Example from Kentucky," *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 20, 1/2 (Apr. 1, 1992): 63-64.

of the Benito church to be told, human interaction with those who once were part or witnesses of it was necessary. As Portelli pointed out, “no research can be considered complete any longer unless it includes oral sources (where available of course).”<sup>71</sup>

A collection of interviews and archival documents was published in 2001 by the Euro-Asian Accreditation Association (a Christian educational organization) with the support of the Mennonite Central Committee.<sup>72</sup> The materials pertain to the history of the Evangelical movement in the Russian Empire and the USSR, and were used in this thesis as needed. Besides, the present author possesses copies of a number of documents from the AUCECB archives. Most of them belong to the post-war period, particularly 1960s, but some date back to the 1920s, and 1930s when the Union of Evangelical Christians still enjoyed legal existence in the USSR.

The theoretical framework of the research, therefore, strives to continue the relatively recent, but growing trend to take into account religious groups’ own histories as they are narrated and interpreted within the group. Consequently, such sources of these histories as interviews, diaries, correspondence, musical and material culture come to the forefront of research. This tendency has been developed lately by Royden Loewen in his comprehensive study of the Mennonite immigrant experience,<sup>73</sup> by Julie Rak in her study

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<sup>71</sup> Portelli, “The Peculiarities of Oral History,” 104.

<sup>72</sup> *Istoriia Evangel'skogo Dvizheniia v Evrazii (The History of the Evangelical Movement in Eurasia)* (Odessa: Collection of documents on a CD published by EAAA, 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Besides Royden Loewen’s *From the Inside Out* see the following works by the same author: *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), *Family, Church and Market: Mennonites Communities in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), and, with Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: A Century of Canadian Cultural Diversity* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

of the Canadian Doukhobors, and by Catherine Wanner in her work on Ukrainian (in fact, all late and post-Soviet) Evangelical immigration in the USA.<sup>74</sup>

There are a few apparent reasons why oral history and accounts of personal experience are of such importance for researchers of immigrant religion in Western Canada. The first and most general of them is, according to Royden Lowen, that an informal personal account “turns the often hidden contours of household and community ‘inside out,’ allowing the student to see a dynamic to which census, newspaper, and parish records can only hint.”<sup>75</sup> Informal history allows us to restore “the webs of significance”<sup>76</sup> of the generations already gone, and appreciate what ordinary people made out of important historical events and what those events meant to them.

Secondly, such religiously motivated settlers in Western Canada as Anabaptists and Doukhobors in varying degrees tended to create separate or insular communities. Sometimes (Hutterites and Community Doukhobors) communal living and working was the only acceptable *modus vivendi* for a religious group. In the case of Mennonites, settlers had a history of living in block settlements and had an extensive system of internal order cohesive enough to keep them together. Sometimes, as with Slavic Evangelicals, immigrants used to create communities and live near each other mainly due to the language and cultural barrier, and to strengthen the ties of mutual support and encouragement that helped them to survive under challenging circumstances. Insular communities gave birth to insular self-perception and self-identification that Julie Rak called “diasporic imaginary,.. a set of tropes [used by immigrant communities to]

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<sup>74</sup> Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted. Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> Loewen, *From the Inside Out*, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973), 3.

construct their own history and their own way of relating knowledge about that history.”<sup>77</sup> Naturally, a significant part of the collective story constructed by an insular community remains outside and beyond formal records, media coverage, or even public awareness. Direct contact with the living voices of those insular communities, or, at least, echoes of those voices deposited in the informal history, seems to be the best way to uncover the “hidden worlds” (as Royden Lowen coined them) of the immigrant experience in the Canadian West.

The third reason stems from the fact that the immigrant story is usually that of adjustment, and, hence, certain tension. This tension might have been minimal, as in the case of Slavic Evangelicals, moderate, as with some Mennonites and Hutterites, or grow up into an open long-term conflict, as with Doukhobors. Communities in the state of an ongoing tension or conflict with the mainstream usually have an elaborate alternative history, often diametrically opposite to the official one, revealing rationale for disagreement or resistance. Looking at Freedomite (or Sons of Freedom, Rus. *svobodniki*) Doukhobors as, perhaps, the most outstanding yet representative example, it is clear that their self-identity has no common ground whatsoever with the image of “illiterate, barn-burning, non-English speaking, nude bombers propagated by government commissions and the Canadian media.”<sup>78</sup> What seemed irrational, erratic and bizarre from the mainstream Canadian point of view, made perfect logical sense when seen “from the inside out.” However, personal communication, private correspondence, listening to memories and similar sources must be used to gain access to their alternative story since Freedomites never had any access to Canadian media or other formal means of

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<sup>77</sup> Rak, “Doukhobor Autobiography,” 225.

<sup>78</sup> Rak, “Doukhobor Autobiography”, 228.

communicating their views to the general public. Besides, they never had anyone from the mainstream to represent them before the larger Canadian society. Thus, oral history methods and other informal means of collecting historical data prove to be the practically the only way to see the Freedomite problem objectively.

Finally, our review of sources will not be complete without saying a few words about visual evidence. During our field trips to Manitoba some informants were willing to share such non-verbal and non-textual items as photographs pertaining to the history of the Benito congregation, and, sometimes, to their personal or family history. Such pieces of visual information may be helpful if used properly. To be able to use photos as a source of information, a researcher should gather as much information as possible regarding each piece of photography. Especially important are the date of the photo, the circumstances under which it was taken, identification of the place and people pictured. When analysed properly, a researcher can learn a lot from a photo. For example, photos of the exterior or the interior of the church building may shed light on such details as the quality of construction and its cost, any traditional or heritage construction patterns, religious influences and patterns that may become apparent based upon the interior or decorations of the church, and so on.

### **Chapter Division**

The second chapter of the thesis will deal with the origins, history and character of the Slavic Evangelical movement. A special emphasis will be put upon tracing a historical linkage among Evangelical Christians and earlier instances of religious dissent in Russia, particularly, Spiritual Christians as well as kindred church of Russian Baptists.

Pietists. This chapter will demonstrate that, in spite of a high degree of theological and practical kinship with Russian Baptists, the internal philosophy and self-consciousness of the Evangelical Christians was of a noticeably distinct sort.

The third chapter will overview the history of Slavic Evangelical Christians outside Russia and the USSR, the emergence of the diaspora brotherhood, and its geographical extension. The chapter will particularly regard the movement as a transnational phenomenon. Its branches existed in number of ethnically and culturally diverse countries and developments that took place in one location were felt and affected other branches of the movement thousands of kilometres away.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters will treat the history of the Benito congregation within the broader context of the history of Evangelical Christians in Canada and of Russian and Ukrainian immigration to Canada. The periodization of the Benito community history generally coincides with the timing of the immigrant experience in the Canadian Prairies set forth by Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen in their recent study of urban immigrants.<sup>79</sup> According to Loewen and Friesen, “foreign migration to prairie cities can be pictured in three distinct periods, running from 1900 to 1930s, from 1940 to the 1960s, and from 1970 to the 1990s,” where the second period is overshadowed with the war and its effects, and the third period was inaugurated with the advent of Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s multiculturalism policy. Although Benito was a rural community, this periodization applies to it as well.

The fourth chapter will embrace the history of the congregation from late 1920s till the end of World War II, while the fifth chapter will cover the period from the late 1940s till mid-1960s, and the sixth chapter will be devoted to the last time period in the

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<sup>79</sup> Loewen and Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities*, 7-8.

life of the church from the mid-1960s till 1996. The reason of this breaking the history of the Benito church into three parts is twofold. Firstly, by late 1940s what started as a small rural congregation grew into a large and strong church capable of carrying out independent projects such as sponsoring DP's to come to Canada. Secondly, WWII marked a shift in church demographics, since the halt of any immigration from the East put an end to the constant influx of newcomers who joined the church no longer keeping its demographics positive. Besides, from about that time children of the first settlers began increasingly to leave the farms of their parents in favour of educational and professional opportunities offered by urban centers, thus further weakening church demographics. This history will be placed within the geographical, chronological, cultural and religious context. The history of the community may be divided into three stages for the purposes of clearer treatment.

The initial stage started when scattered small groups and individuals in the area officially agreed to form a congregation, erected a church building and acquired a sense of community and belonging (late 1920s – early 1930s). The Benito congregation that was officially established around 1930 at first met in private homes of its members or in Doukhobor prayer homes, with the permission of the Doukhobor community.<sup>80</sup> It was necessary to use a larger and more specialized space than a private home could offer in case of church conferences with a large number of guests and in case of evangelistic meetings aimed at the general public outside of the congregation. However, by 1941 the Benito church constructed its own church building.

The peak stage, analysed in Chapter V includes late 1940s to early 1960s when the membership reached its peak, in part due to the influx of post-war immigrants from

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<sup>80</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 15.

Eastern Europe, according to compilation of the Benito Church history written by Linda McKinnon.<sup>81</sup> This stage was characterized by persistent evangelization efforts, radio broadcasting, activities of the Bible school, church conferences and similar activities.

The third stage, discussed in Chapter VI, may be called the period of decline. The decline started in the late 1960s and lasted until the church was officially disbanded in 1996, although there are still former members living in the area. This period is characterized by membership loss, aging of the membership and a virtual halt of most church activities except worship meetings. The prayer home, initially a fairly small building, was re-built and expanded in the 1960s. However, church membership had been declining since the late fifties due to assimilation and moving out of younger people who took up city jobs in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, and elsewhere instead of traditional farming.

In 1996 the congregation declared itself officially dissolved. The church building, which was not used any longer, started deteriorating structurally. Former members of the congregation attempted to offer the building free of charge to various religious groups in the area. However, these other communities, that faced a similar problem of shrinking and aging membership, declined the offer. The Benito church building was finally demolished in 2003. Its former spot remains empty until now. The former members of the congregation and other lifelong residents of Benito whom the author interviewed preserved fond memories of the Benito church. According to them, the church in its better years was one of the finest and most beautiful and well-kept buildings in town. They expressed deep regret over the need to demolish the church, but regarded it as a

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<sup>81</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 45.

lesser evil compared to the state of abandonment and deterioration the building suffered prior to its demolition.

Each of the chapters on the Benito church will deal with internal processes within the church at different stages in terms of both demographics (aging, educational level, occupations, command of English/native languages) and religious practices (appropriating North American Protestant worship practices, church discipline, theology, liturgical use of English). Special attention will be devoted to important markers of the demographic decline (such as steady aging of the membership, rising intermarriage rates, improving educational level, and shrinking use of the native tongue). These developments will be contrasted, where applicable, with parallel developments among comparable groups of religious settlers, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors. They were not the root of the problem *per se*. Rather, they were an outcome of the internal processes of disintegration that were at work within the broader Slavic Evangelical movement abroad. By contrast, other comparable groups of religious settlers in the Canadian Prairies, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors often exhibited quite different patterns of behaviour under similar circumstances.

The seventh chapter places the Benito church and the movement of the Slavic Evangelical Christians within the context of the Canadian Protestantism, particularly evangelicalism. It also provides a comparative analysis of the responses of other immigrant ethno-religious groups, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors, to the challenges Slavic Evangelicals faced. These challenges included discrimination and prejudice of the wider society and pressure from the government, internal fragmentation, the question of allegiance to a foreign country, among others. Although Slavic Evangelicals experienced

less pressure than these other groups, they proved to be less resilient and ultimately unable to sustain their cohesion as a distinct ethno-religious group.

Finally, the eighth chapter will be devoted to the life stories of two early Slavic Evangelical settlers in Canada, Feoktist Dunaenko and Ivan Shakotko. Although not directly related to the community in Benito, this biographical material will enhance the human dimension of the Evangelical resettlement in this country. It is meant to contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the life of early Evangelical immigrants “from inside out” in order to reveal “hidden worlds” of immigrant religion in the Prairies not accessible otherwise.

The Conclusion will answer a few conceptual questions set forth in this research. Namely, it will be devoted to the analysis of the factors contributing to the stability and cohesion of an ethno-confessional group of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada as well as to obvious and hidden mechanics of its disintegration.

## **Chapter II. An Historical Outline of the Slavic Evangelical Movement in Russia and the USSR. The Evangelical Vision**

This chapter will review the history of the Evangelical Christians and demonstrate their role as an important movement of Russian religious dissent. The chapter begins with an outline of the emergence of Protestantism in modern-day Russia and Ukraine in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and devotes some space to the Spiritual Christians whose heirs Evangelical Christians became. There were three geographical foci of Protestantism in the Russian Empire, in Ukraine, Caucasus, and Saint Petersburg.<sup>1</sup> The two large Protestant denominations, Baptists and Evangelical Christians, arose out of these isolated foci.

Further, we will indicate our position in regards to the ongoing quest of Russia's lost Reformation.<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Christians were the most active reformation force, probably the only one capable of starting a nationwide religious reformation movement. The Evangelical Christians, unlike socially and politically more passive Baptists, possessed a vision of a comprehensive reform in Russia, including social, economical, and political aspects. This chapter will describe what the goals and aspirations of the Evangelical community were and how Evangelical Christians understood their own role

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that in this thesis the term "Protestant" is used to refer to such religious denominations as the Evangelical Christians, the Baptists, and the Pentecostals. These and similar "sectarian" communities, rather than Lutherans or Calvinists, gained following among the Slavic and non-Slavic population of the Russian Empire and came to represent the Protestant thought and ethos within the Russian and East Slavic context. E.g. *Russian Protestants* by Steve Durasoff (1969) is devoted almost exclusively to Baptists, Evangelical Christians, and Pentecostals. Recent researchers of the religious dissent in Russia and East Slavic lands, such as Heather Coleman and Catherine Wanner have used the term "Protestantism" in the same sense.

<sup>2</sup> Recently the problem has been discussed at length by Sergei Zhuk in his *Russia's Lost Reformation. Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830–1917* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), and Heather Coleman in *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905–1929* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).

within Christendom. Periodicals, published by Evangelical Christians at different periods of their history, *Khristianin* (The Christian), published in Russia and the USSR until 1928, *Evangel'skaia vera*, (The Gospel Faith), published in New York, Berlin, and Tallinn from 1931 until 1940, and *Evangel'skoe slovo* (The Word of Gospel), published in Chicago from 1962 until 1977 will be used as main primary sources.

### **Russian Religious Dissent before the Advent of Protestantism**

Russia, as it is known, has never had an analogue to the Protestant Reformation of the Western Europe. Although seeds of dissent were ever-present in Russian religiosity, alternatives to the dominant Orthodox church have been always confined to the status of sects. The Reformation of Luther or Calvin did not produce any noticeable immediate effect upon the religion in the country. Russia was too isolated politically, culturally, and mentally from the rest of Europe at that time, and it was not until 18<sup>th</sup> century that the influence of Protestant forms of theology, worship, and worldview became clearly discernible within Russian sectarianism.<sup>3</sup>

These proto-Protestant movements that emerged and developed in modern-day Russia and Ukraine are usually referred to as Spiritual Christians (*dukhovnye khristiane*). The two most well known branches of the Spiritual Christians are Molokans and Doukhobors. Both emerged in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Possibly, the general turn towards westernization and the influx of foreigners under by Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725) was a condition that made their emergence possible. Furthermore, the mass religious immigration of European dissidents to Russia provided another impetus for the

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<sup>3</sup> James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1970), 277.

appearance of native religious communities theologically and otherwise fairly similar to European Protestants.<sup>4</sup>

European Protestantism was only one influence among many in the formative process of the Spiritual Christians. The Protestant influence, even when clearly present, was hardly ever united. Protestant ideas, in a broad sense of the term, came from various directions – Lutheran Pietists, Mennonites, Hutterites, and Quakers.<sup>5</sup> Though western Protestants might have provided certain patterns (such as reliance upon the Bible, egalitarian worship structure, or Christian pacifism), the Spiritual Christians also bore signs of their Orthodox heritage and, possibly, elements of such old traditions of Christian heterodoxy as Gnostics or the Balkan *bogumili*.<sup>6</sup>

What differentiates Spiritual Christians from most western Protestants is the symbolic interpretation of the Christian sacraments, or rituals, such as baptism and communion. This distinction would later become the main barrier between Molokans and the growing Baptist church in Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere. Some early 20<sup>th</sup> century “progressive” Molokans in the Caucasus were even referred to as “dry Baptists” (*sukhie baptisty*), because otherwise those Molokans almost did not differ from the Baptists.

Of course, old sects of Spiritual Christians in Russia were gradually weakened by massive loss of members to expanding Protestant evangelicalism, by emigration from Russia (Doukhobors to Canada in 1898-1899, Molokans to the USA in 1904-1912, New

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, 19<sup>th</sup> century testimonies of Stephen Grellet, a Quaker minister, in *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of Stephen Grellet* in 2 Vols. (London: A.W. Bennet, 1862), 2:400-401.

<sup>5</sup> On Quakers and the old Russian religious dissent see Richenda C. Scott, *Quakers in Russia* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1964), 29-34. On the movement of Jehovahists, a Russian sectarian off-shoot of the German chiliastic Pietism, please see: Sergey Petrov, “Nikolai Il’in and His Jehovahist Followers: Crossroads of German Pietistic Chiliasm and Russian Religious Dissent” (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> On the *bogumili* see, for example Dmitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1948).

Israelites to Uruguay in 1913),<sup>7</sup> and, most gravely, by forced collectivization ordered by Stalin in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Yet, their legacy and the influence on subsequent forms of Russian non-conformist ideology had been noticeable and lasting. In a very substantial way the Spiritual Christians prepared the way for the spread of the Protestant evangelicalism. Without the catalytic role of Spiritual Christians and the support Protestantism enjoyed among their ranks, the success of the latter in Russia might have been far more modest. Thus, the Spiritual Christians contained the necessary ideological ferment that facilitated an easy acceptance of Protestant doctrines and forms of worship, and provided a large social base for the expansion of Protestantism.

Some key features of Spiritual Christians, therefore, are their non-ritualism and their independent character and the lack of identification (in spite of obvious influences) with any foreign denomination or church. Another point of importance for our discussion is their traditionally non-exclusive and tolerant approach to differences in doctrinal details: “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3:6, NIV)

### **Three Geographical Foci of Russian Protestantism**

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century strong mass movements of religious dissent appeared in all probability independently of each other in three geographically distinct parts of the former Russian Empire. One focus, which was located in the present-day Central and Southern Ukraine, is known as the Stundist movement. Stundists emerged

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<sup>7</sup> On the background and history of the Spiritual Christians’ migrations see, for example: Andrew Donskov, ed. *Sergej Tolstoy and the Doukhobors: a Journey to Canada*. Trans. John Woodsworth. (Ottawa: Slavic Research Group, 1998); Susan W. Hardwick, *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 80-99; Sergey Petrov, “Novyi Izrail’: Transformatsiia vetvi russkogo religioznogo raznomyслиia,” (New Israel: Transformation of a Branch of Russian Religious Dissent) *Religiovedenie* 2 (June 2006): 40-58.

and grew under the direct influence of the German colonists living in the area. Many of the latter were Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, a revivalist movement within Russian Mennonites that emerged in 1860. Another group of Germans living on numerous colonies that likewise was involved with the birth of the Ukrainian Stundism were Lutheran Pietists and Separatists.<sup>8</sup> Early Ukrainian Stundists either had close associations with the revival-minded Germans through business or neighbourhood, or else were directly employed by them as permanent or temporary workers. The birth of the Ukrainian Stundism can be dated back to 1850s when Fedor Onishchenko, a peasant from the village of Osnova located near the Pietist colony of Rohrbach (nowadays the Odessa region in Ukraine), converted to the Pietist-styled version of Christianity. The first public baptism of Ukrainian adherents of the same type of religion took place in 1869 near the Mennonite colony of Alt Danzig (now the Kherson region of Ukraine).<sup>9</sup> Personal conversion to Christ followed by the water baptism ritual was an essential tenet of the Stundist movement from the very beginning. The Stundists followed a fairly structured organizational pattern in their communities modeled after the Germans. Able leaders appeared in local congregations who led missionary work, and meetings for worship, and administered baptism. Stundists were subject to harsh governmental repression as a

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<sup>8</sup> See Andreas Gestrich, "German Religious Emigration to Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity. New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*, Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, Renate Wilson, ed., (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 77-98; Lawrence Klippenstein, "The Mennonite Migration to Russia 1786-1806" in *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988. Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz*, John Friesen, ed. (Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1989), 13-42.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press 1969), 40.

“harmful sect” and suffered from sporadic outbursts of violence from their Orthodox neighbours, often instigated by the clergy.<sup>10</sup>

In an early archival document written by the Stundists their organization is referred to as “the baptized Russian brotherhood” (*kreshchenoe russkoe bratstvo*)<sup>11</sup> where “Russian” is, of course, an indication of the non-German ethnic composition of the community. The importance attributed by the Stundists to the ritual of baptism is clear from the following description of it, written by an outsider: “It was performed obligatorily in a river, even in the winter time. In the latter case they made a long ice hole from the river bank up to the spot where the water would reach up to the chest.”<sup>12</sup> Baptism among Stundists often had a public character, being a solemn occasion to declare the faith of a supplicant, re-affirm the commitment of the present church members, and to preach to spectators who were at times quite numerous.<sup>13</sup>

Baptists were a recognized confession in Russia from 1879, although this legal recognition covered only non-Orthodox population of the Russian Empire, such as Germans and Latvians. Nevertheless, Stundists from early on preferred to identify with the Baptists in the hope of gaining legal status and recognition of the authorities. In 1872 Ivan Riaboshapka, one of the first Stundist leaders, petitioned (to no avail) Mikhail Loris-

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<sup>10</sup> Testimonies of violence against sectarians are numerous. See, for instance “The Case of Beating of Stundists by Peasants” as of 1878 in F. 442 Op.282 D.16 TsGIAUK Kiev (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, Kiev).

<sup>11</sup> A Letter of Recommendation by Mikhail Ratushnyi (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, Kherson department, TsGIAUKh, F.1 Op.1 D.40, 1872, Village of Ignatovka, Kherson guberniia).

<sup>12</sup> P. Petrushevskii, “Zametki proezzhego o shtundizme v Tarashchanskom uezde” (Notes of a Traveller on the Stundism in the Tarashcha District), *Kievskie Eparkhial'nye Vedomosti* 18-29 (1880): 11-16.

<sup>13</sup> N 2252, D., 1887 N 53, TsGARK (Central State Archive of the Republic of Crimea).

Melikov, the Minister of the Interior, on behalf of many co-religionists, whose notarized signatures he collected, to recognize their movement as Baptist, and not Stundist.<sup>14</sup>

Early Stundists used for some time the Lutheran book of common prayers published in the Russian translation in 1872. After 1880 Ukrainian Baptists “turn to German Baptist presbyters with their religious needs. They translate into Russian for their own use German Baptist hymnals and sermons.”<sup>15</sup> After about 10 years from their emergence most Ukrainian Stundists became Baptists in every sense of the word. Not all Stundists turned Baptists, though. Some, “who did not accept the Baptist articles of faith became known under the name of ‘Spiritual Stundists,’ ‘New Stundists,’ ‘Stundo-Pashkovites,’ ‘Non-Anabaptists (*ne perekreshchentsy*), or ‘Evangelical Christians.’” Those groups were close in their doctrine and practice to Spiritual Christians. They sought support of the Pashkovites (the third focus of the Russian Protestantism we will discuss below), while some of them shared views of the Doukhobors and Leo Tolstoy.<sup>16</sup>

The second geographical and cultural milieu where a similar movement emerged was the Caucasus (the Northern Caucasus, present-day Russian Federation, and the Transcaucasian region, that is, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). Most members of the Baptist communities in that region initially were former Molokans, disillusioned by the traditionalist faith of Molokanism, and longing for a more personal, modern, and dynamic kind of religion. The first person in the Russian Empire (in Tiflis, now Tbilisi, Georgia) to become a Baptist was former Molokan minister Nikita Isaevich Voronin

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<sup>14</sup> Protopriest K. Minin, *Missionerskie svedeniia o raskole (Missionary Information on the Schism)* (Istina: 1880).

<sup>15</sup> Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt I ikh tolkov (The Review of Russian Sects and Their Branches)* (Kharkov: Tipografiia gubernskago pravleniia, 1910), 474.

<sup>16</sup> Butkevich, *Obzor*, 475-476.

on August 20, 1867.<sup>17</sup> Voronin independently came to the conclusion of the necessity of the water baptism, and local Baptists provided him with a theoretical and practical framework which fit his aspirations. At first Voronin joined the small German Baptist church already existing in Tiflis, but a few years later former Molokans converted to the Baptist faith outnumbered Germans. Soon groups of Baptists existed in all cities, towns, and villages where there were Molokan communities.

The group in the Caucasus at once accepted the name of Baptists. This was due to a few factors. Firstly, the theological framework and the initial church home for the first converts was provided by the established, albeit small, Baptist community. Secondly, virtually all first converts (and most converts for decades thereafter) were defectors from the Molokan church, an established denomination with well-defined internal structure and a strong identity. Therefore, those who left the old church sought a comparable confessional structure that could provide the convert with the same sense of identity he or she enjoyed in the former church. Thirdly, the ritual of water baptism was the main feature that sharply separated Baptists from Molokans, for otherwise both denominations stressed the Bible as the word of God, congregational democratic structure, simple worship with preaching, prayer, and singing, and adherence to high moral standards. Thus, converts from Molokanism naturally wanted to emphasize their belief in baptism as a part of Christian practice overlooked in Molokanism. Therefore, a conscious and deliberate association with the denomination that held baptism as one of the cornerstones of its doctrine was a logical step.

Orthodox priest Aleksandr Iunitskii in his review of religious dissent in the Caucasus, brought up substantial evidence of active contacts between former Molokans,

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<sup>17</sup> Durasoff, *Russian Protestants*, 37.

new members of Baptist communities, and British and German Baptists. He mentioned visits of British and German Baptist missionaries to the Caucasus and numerous book and brochure titles brought from abroad. Vasilii Pavlov, a young man who was employed by Nikita Voronin as a business manager, was sent by the Baptist community to Hamburg to study in a Baptist theological seminary following his conversion and baptism (1871).<sup>18</sup>

We should take into account that Baptists in the Caucasus were on the average wealthier than their Ukrainian counterparts. Many Molokans in the Caucasus, especially urban dwellers, were business owners. The tendency was that the wealthier of Molokans were rather likely to embrace Baptism.<sup>19</sup> Beside their solid financial situation, Baptists in the Caucasus were used to a high degree of religious freedom. They were pretty much left alone in this respect by the government and the Orthodox church, since they lived in a far-away place where the percentage of Russian Orthodox inhabitants they could possibly influence was small.<sup>20</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that Caucasian Baptists assumed many positions of importance in the emerging Russian Baptist Union.

Many Stundists from the Ukraine were routinely exiled to the Caucasus prior to the Manifesto of Religious Tolerance of 1905, and came in contact with local Baptists. In spite of difficult conditions of exile, Ukrainian Stundists often found it a better option to

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<sup>18</sup> Iunitskii, 157-159; S. Margaritov, *Istoriia russkikh misticheskikh i ratsionalisticheskikh sekt (The History of Russian Mystical and Rationalist Sects)* (Simferopol', 1910), 158.

<sup>19</sup> Aleksandr Il'ich Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia (1860s-1917)*, Ethel Dunn, tr., Stephen P. Dunn, ed. (Oxford, New York et al.: Pergamon Press, 1982), 234.

<sup>20</sup> On the Russian colonization of the Caucasus and the role of dissenting sectarians in it see Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

live peacefully in exile than to endure discrimination, police oppression, and limitations of religious freedom at home.<sup>21</sup>

The third focus of religious dissent that would later evolve into the movement of Evangelical Christians appeared in the capital, the city of Saint-Petersburg in the 1870s. Gradually, as a result of a conscious effort and mass enthusiasm, it spread from there throughout the country. It had a few noticeable differences from the first two. Remarkably, the St. Petersburg focus had no direct Baptist connections whatsoever until all three foci of Protestantism “discovered” each other some time in the 1880s.

The catalyst of the Evangelical movement in the capital was the British aristocrat, religious activist and preacher Granville Augustus William Waldegrave, 3rd Baron Radstock (1833-1913).<sup>22</sup> Lord Radstock was among the ranks of the British military during the Crimean War (1853) of Britain and France against Russia, got wounded in a battle, and converted to deep personal faith in Christ under the impact of the horrors of war. Soon thereafter he devoted himself to preaching, charity work among the poor, especially in the London East End, and missionary efforts outside Britain.

In the literature there is a certain degree of confusion regarding Lord Radstock’s denominational connection. Edmund Heier asserted Radstock belonged to “Low Church” Anglicanism or Methodism. Heier supposed that “[Radstock’s activity’s] starting point may be linked with Wesley and his successors in early Methodism.”<sup>23</sup> Heier was silent on the possible connection of Lord Radstock with the church of Plymouth Brethren. Many

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<sup>21</sup> Sergey Petrov, “From the Ukraine to the Caucasus to the Canadian Prairies: Life as Wandering in the Spiritual Autobiography of Feoktist Dunaenko,” *Historical Papers* (2008): 70.

<sup>22</sup> On Lord Radstock and Radstockism see, among other titles: David Fountain, *Lord Radstock and the Russian Awakening* (Southampton: Mayflower Christian Books, 1988); Edmund Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy 1860-1900. Radstockism and Pashkovism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).

<sup>23</sup> Heier, *Religious Schism*, 32.

other authors mention that Radstock was either a member of the “Open” Plymouth Brethren, or, at least, was close to them. Radstock’s preaching in Russia suggests that the Brethren doctrine was very likely part of his worldview. As it is known, Plymouth Brethren is a restorationist movement. They generally avoid anything that can be interpreted as a sign of denominationalism, and see no difficulty (especially Open Brethren) in joint preaching and charity activities with any other Christians that teach salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> Baptism, according to Brethren, has nothing to do with salvation, and is merely is an outward symbol. Not surprisingly, Radstock did not baptize anyone on his missionary trips to Russia. Nor did he preach baptism or any other rituals. He also promoted a decidedly non-denominational stance. According to Heier, “when asked what religion he [i.e. Radstock] professed he would state the Christian, and to what church specifically, he replied the Church of Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

The preaching of Radstock was directed by necessity to the Russian aristocracy and to the educated classes since he preached in French, then widely spoken by the Russian elite, or in English, and rarely were his speeches translated into the local language. Radstock visited Russia three times, in 1874, 1875, and 1876. As a result, a circle of believers was formed in the capital, which consisted mostly of influential and rich members of aristocracy, such as Colonel Vasilii Aleksandrovich Pashkov, the aide-de-camp to the emperor, Count Bobrinskii, then Minister of Transport, Princess Lieven, Modest Modestovich Korf, Countess Gagarina, and others.<sup>26</sup> Colonel Pashkov soon

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<sup>24</sup> On Open Brethren and their ecumenism see Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement: Its origins, Its Worldwide Development and Its Significance for the Present Day* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001) and Robert Worcester Shinn, “The Plymouth Brethren and Ecumenical Protestantism” (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1967).

<sup>25</sup> Heier, *Religious Schism*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Heier, *Religious Schism*, 53.

became the leader of the group, and, making use of his own substantial wealth, launched a preaching campaign among factory workers and lower strata of society in Saint-Petersburg, workers on his own estates throughout Russia, and elsewhere. Followers and sympathizers of this movement became known as *pashkovtsy* (the Pashkovites), although they called themselves simply Christians, or Gospel Christians (*evangel'skie khristiane*).

As we can see, chronologically this third focus of Protestantism appeared somewhat later than the first two. However, it was by the initiative of Pashkov and thanks to the non-denominational approach of his group that the first joint conference of all Evangelically-minded believers in Russia was called for in the city of Saint Petersburg in 1884.<sup>27</sup> The conference of 1884, which highlighted differences among dissenting groups, marked an important benchmark in the early history of Protestantism in Russia. It showed the independent character of the Pashkovites as a non-conformist group in its own right, and made obvious the leading and, indeed, visionary role of the emerging Evangelical Christian movement in the process of the attempted Reformation in Russia.

Characteristically, among the delegates of the conference were Stundists and Baptists along with Spiritual Christians, Molokans and Doukhobors.<sup>28</sup> Apparently, the Pashkovite non-denominational approach regarded them all as the seed of that planned great revival.

Summarizing our discussion of the three foci of the evangelical dissent in the Russian Empire, it is worthwhile to emphasize once again a non-denominational character of the Pashkovites and their non-alignment with any particular Western religious group, their broad vision of a large-scale religious and social reform for the

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<sup>27</sup> Durasoff, *Russian Protestants*, 44-46.

<sup>28</sup> Heier, *Religious Schism*, 118; Liudvig Shenderovskii, *Evangel'skie Khristiane Vozrozhdennoe evangel'skoe dvizhenie v istoricheskoi khristianskoi tserkvi (Evangelical Christians. The Re-born Evangelical Movement within the Historical Christian Church)* (Toronto: Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians, 1980), 115.

whole Russia of which they sought to become an integral part, and their stress upon non-ritualism and disregard of external forms of worship which linked them to the autochthonous Spiritual Christians. Pashkov's goal was not to baptize Molokans, but, rather, to provide them with a renewed basis of faith common for all likeminded believers, while minor disagreements did not worry him. Pashkov and Saint-Petersburg believers invited Molokans, Doukhobors, Baptists, and Stundists to Saint Petersburg to discuss what they had in common and how they could work together.

### **The Emergence of the Evangelical Christians. Baptists and Evangelical Christians**

The "Radstockist," or "Pashkovite" movement that emerged among the upper strata of Russian society very soon overcame its social limitation and began to spread throughout the Empire. Of course, Pashkov, Korf and other wealthy aristocrats gave an impulse to the missionary work, contributing large amounts of money to charity, printing popular brochures (through The Society for Encouragement of Spiritual and Ethical Reading, which legally existed in Russia till 1884), and holding mass gospel meetings in their spacious Saint-Petersburg palaces. Yet, as the movement gained momentum, recent converts, often peasants or factory workers, joined the work of disseminating the non-denominational, Bible-based non-ritualistic Christianity. Religious sectarians that resided throughout the country, particularly, in Southern Russia and the Ukraine, were a special goal of these unification efforts. The diverse social and geographical base of the Pashkovite movement is quite distinct from the more homogenous membership of Caucasian Baptists and Ukrainian Stundists. The social make-up of the Ukrainian

Stundists included mostly impoverished landless peasants,<sup>29</sup> and that of Caucasian Baptists was characterised by the prominence of middle to upper middle class bourgeoisie. In the case of the Evangelical Christians-Pashkovites it would be difficult, probably impossible, to define a specific strata of the society where the movement was especially strong. Klibanov admitted that Pashkovism “crossed the thresholds of high-society houses and penetrated into the milieu of artisans, *meshchane* (townspeople), workers, the lumpen proletariat and also the peasant population.”<sup>30</sup> This is in agreement with the observation made by Timofei Butkevich, that Pashkovites proselytized more consistently among all classes of the Russian population and used more sophisticated methods than any other sectarians.<sup>31</sup> So, the social composition of Evangelical Christians contrasted with two other Protestant branches in Russia in that it had more even representation of different classes and ranks of society among their ranks.

The Conference of 1884 was aborted by the police in the middle of its proceedings, and the delegates from the interior were forcibly sent home. The wave of reaction that followed led to eventual banishment of Vasilii Pashkov and Modest Korf from Russia, forced dissolution of the Society for Spiritual and Ethical Reading, and a prohibition of public gospel meetings. Many of the titles that had been previously published by the Society were confiscated and destroyed. Russian nobility that were members or sympathizers of the Pashkovites, were still able to conduct gospel meetings in the privacy of their homes, but all public preaching was now illegal. Moreover, the governmental reaction and the risk of falling into disfavour with the court turned many of

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<sup>29</sup> Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 242.

<sup>30</sup> Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 245.

<sup>31</sup> Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov (A Review of Russian Sects and Their Branches)* (Kharkov: Tipografiia gubernskago pravleniia, 1910), 503-4.

the nobility away from the Evangelical cause. Pashkov and Korf did what they could to provide leadership and guidance from a distance, but they obviously could not manage it in an adequate manner. Of all the places of worship in the capital only three persisted after the banishment of the leaders: the homes of Mme. Chertkova, Princess Gagarina, and Princess Lieven.<sup>32</sup> With few male activists capable of preaching and conducting prayer meetings, the Saint-Petersburg Pashkovites started to invite Baptist and Stundist preachers. According to Heier, this created “a development which deviated even farther from the ecumenical venture which sought at the beginning to do away with denominational differences. With the arrival of such preachers and especially I.S. Prokhanov in the 1890’s in St. Petersburg, a Baptist of Molokan origin from the Caucasus, the Pashkovites like all other Evangelicals evolved into just another sect with a distinct congregational theology and structure.”<sup>33</sup> Edmund Heier finished his study of the Pashkovite movement with its persecution and touched briefly the arrival of Prokhanov who was finally able to provide energetic and efficient leadership for the scattered groups of the Pashkovites. For Heier, Prokhanov’s leadership was a sign that the movement was becoming yet another “sect,” thus deviating from its original purpose. Any mass movement, albeit spontaneous and informal at the beginning, has to face sooner or later the inevitable question of formalizing its status. Weber wrote, “Indeed, in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both.”<sup>34</sup> The Pashkovite movement could not be an exception even if Pashkov and Korf

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<sup>32</sup> Heier, *Religious Schism*, 147.

<sup>33</sup> Heier, *Religious Schism*, 147.

<sup>34</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press & The Falcon Wings Press, 1947), 364.

would have remained in Russia. However, it is reasonable to believe that the direction the movement took under the leadership of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov, was not a deviation, but rather, a logical development of what it was originally meant to be. Prokhanov created a centralized organization instead of a large number of loose groups. Evangelical Christians summarized their beliefs in a written creed (which was a pre-requisite of their legal registration). But otherwise the Union of Evangelical Christians created by Ivan Prokhanov preserved such basic and distinct tenets of Pashkovism as ecumenism and openness towards all like-minded believers; pursuit of unity or active co-operation with all Christians based upon shared goals despite theological disagreements; social concern and advocacy of a large-scale social and spiritual reform; explicit non-ritualism and simple and democratic structure.

### **Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov**

Ivan Prokhanov was born in 1869 in Vladikavkaz, North Caucasus into a Molokan family.<sup>35</sup> Throughout his lifetime Prokhanov retained the fondness, respect and intimate love towards his Molokan family, the Molokan way of life in general, and the hard path of suffering, obedience, and faithfulness the Molokans took. His father became a Baptist, and Ivan himself was baptized at the age of 17 in his native town. In 1888 he departed for Saint Petersburg to become a student at the Technological Institute. Simultaneously he joined the circle of Pashkovites in the capital, and became one of the active members and preachers. In 1893 Prokhanov graduated from the Institute with an engineering diploma. Even before his conversion, Prokhanov displayed great interest in

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<sup>35</sup> On Prokhanov's life see his autobiography *In the Cauldron of Russia. Autobiography of I.S. Prokhanoff* (New York: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 1933).

philosophy and intellectual attempts to find answers to the meaning of life. He read works popular at that time by Arthur Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann. He was also fascinated by the personality and work of Leo Tolstoy, whom Prokhanov visited in person on his way home following the graduation.<sup>36</sup>

After his graduation young Ivan Prokhanov worked for some time as an engineer. In 1893 Prokhanov and a few of his friends made a short-lived attempt to found an intentional Christian agricultural community in the Crimea. Soon Prokhanov got the news about his father being exiled to Transcaucasia for his religious activism. He had to abandon the colony, and returned to Vladikavkaz. It turned out that he risked being arrested and exiled himself, so Prokhanov decided to leave Russia in 1895. He went to England through Sweden and France (where his brother Aleksandr was studying medicine). In England he received some theological training at the Baptist Theological College in Bristol for a year, and then at a College of the Congregational church in London. Prokhanov explained in his Autobiography that his rationale for changing schools was to get to know different denominations. He wrote: "I desired to gain as comprehensive a view of all the Protestant Christian denominations of Western Europe as might be possible."<sup>37</sup> Ivan was deeply impressed by the religious freedom reigning in Great Britain. He was particularly impressed with the street meetings organized by the Salvation Army. His own milieu during his sojourn in that country was rather multi-denominational. His tuition at the Baptist College was paid by the Quakers. The Quakers also provide him with the lodging. After Britain Ivan Prokhanov proceeded to Berlin and then Paris, where he was attending lectures at the Faculty of Theology at the Berlin

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<sup>36</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 76-81.

<sup>37</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 97.

University and the Faculty of the Protestant Theology at Sorbonne in 1896-97.

Prokhanov regarded his stay in Europe as a temporary one, waiting for an opportunity to return to Russia. Finally, in 1898 Prokhanov was asked to help the members of the Russian pacifist sect of the Doukhobors stranded on the island of Cyprus on their way to Canada, and, after that, in the same year, returned to Russia. Upon his return, Prokhanov taught at the Polytechnical Institute in Riga and worked for the Russian branch of the US-owned Westinghouse Company that was developing a light rail system in the capital.<sup>38</sup>

Although Prokhanov had become a recognized leader of Evangelical Christians earlier, it was not until 1908 that the communities of Evangelical Christians formed a union. In 1905, following the publication of the Imperial October Manifesto, proclaiming religious toleration,<sup>39</sup> formerly illegal or semi-legal “sectarian” communities received the right to be registered as juridical persons, and, therefore, freely gather for worship, own property, publish books and periodicals, perform recognized marriages etc. According to the new rules, legal registration was necessary to conduct all sorts of missionary endeavours that Prokhanov and his friends were contemplating. The codified articles of faith that were adopted in 1910 were also a legal requirement of the authorities. So, speaking of a growing “denominationalism” of the Evangelical Christians, we should consider that a certain restructuring was a response to the changing legal requirements of

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<sup>38</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 107-114.

<sup>39</sup> The Manifesto contained the following provision: “We require the government dutifully to execute our unshakeable will: to grant to the population the essential foundations of civil freedom, based on the principles of genuine inviolability of the person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.” Tr. by Daniel Field.

the state. A non-denominational brotherhood of churches with no written creed would have never been registered under the law existing in Russia at that time.<sup>40</sup>

In December of 1908, at the 1<sup>st</sup> All-Russian Conference of the Evangelical Christians in Saint-Petersburg, Prokhanov was elected its chairman.<sup>41</sup> At the same time he was the presbyter of one of the Saint-Petersburg local churches. The Union was contemplated as a home for all like-minded Biblical Protestants, not churches, but individuals. “Members of the Union could be all those who sympathize with its goals and tasks and profess key Gospel doctrines. In all other issues of the Christian faith, especially in the sphere of the external expressions of faith and the church organization, the members enjoyed freedom.”<sup>42</sup> Prokhanov’s goal was to work towards “thorough renewal of the religious life of the Russian nation, which he called the spiritual reformation. He was deeply convinced that ‘along with an acute necessity of political and economic reforms... a true renewal of Russia is only possible through a spiritual regeneration and improvement of each individual.’ In this issue Prokhanov at once met opposition from the side of the Russian Baptists.”<sup>43</sup> The Baptists believed that the role of a Christian and of a Christian community is limited to preaching the Gospel and saving souls, while all political, economic, social and similar concerns are totally outside their responsibility. The Baptists took the stance of social passivity and non-involvement in the

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<sup>40</sup> The right to gather for worship legally even after the Manifesto of 1905 was granted on a case by case basis to specific religious denominations. Baptists and Stundists were recognized legally as of April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1906. For instance, local police department of Kovel’ in Volhynia specifically referred to that legal act when asked for a clarification on legality of an Evangelical community in Kovel’. (F. 1598 Op.1 D.194 TsGIAUK, Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine). Sectarian religious communities applying for registration needed to supply a creed for evaluation. See, for instance, “Ob uchrezhdenii Astrakhanskoi obshchiny Evangel’skikh Khristian” (On Establishment of a Community of Evangelical Christians in Astrakhanka), F 27, op.1, d.11703 TsGARK Central State Archive of the Republic of Crimea.

<sup>41</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 149-50.

<sup>42</sup> Ivan Petrovich Plett, *Zarozhdenie Tserkvei EKHB (Emergence of Evangelical-Baptist churches)* Available online at <http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00324.htm#7>.

<sup>43</sup> *Istoriia Evangel’skikh khristian-Baptistov v SSSR (The History of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the USSR)* (Moscow: VSEKhB, 1989), 148-149.

turbulent times. The Baptist Union did not have any vision for Russia specifically, and did not picture itself as a participant in any social development in the country outside strictly religious activities. At first glance such a position of Russian Baptists may seem difficult to comprehend considering that Baptists in North America and Europe were often part of the establishment, counting numerous politicians and social actors among their ranks.<sup>44</sup> There is certainly nothing in the Baptist faith *per se* that discourages political or social activism. The position of Russian Baptists is not hard to explain considering two factors. One of them is the profound influence of German Mennonites (especially in the Ukraine) and Russian Molokans (in the Caucasus). Both groups were to a great degree alienated from the social and political life in Russia, the former primarily due to their own internal restrictions and isolation, and the latter – mainly because of their status as socially and geographically marginalised sectarians. The other factor is the position, both perceived and objective, of the Russian Baptists as a branch of a foreign religious body. As Sergey Filatov put it in a recent article about Russian Protestantism, “[Baptists, as opposed to Evangelical Christians] are foreign to social and political questions, they think about the heavenly, not the earthly, homeland; co-religionists residing in other lands, are closer to them than compatriots who do not know the true God.”<sup>45</sup> The Baptists and the Evangelical Christians had a strikingly different understanding of what their work meant for their country and their people and how that work should be properly carried out. Prokhanov realized that the work of a large-scale Reformation in the country through the non-denominational Evangelical Union would not

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<sup>44</sup> It will suffice to name such prominent figures as Andrew Johnson and Warren Harding, the 17<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> US Presidents (not to mention present-day politicians), Alexander McKenzie, the Canadian Prime minister in 1870s, or Martin Luther King.

<sup>45</sup> Sergey B. Filatov, “Rossiiskii protestantizm: uspekh v ravnodushnom k vere obshchestve” (Russian Protestantism: Success in the Religiously Indifferent Society), *Voprosy Filosofii* 5 (2004): 20-32.

be done unless the Reformation became the will of the masses. But it could not become a mass movement unless it addressed the problems, including social, economic, and political, that concerned the people in general, and offered satisfactory solutions to those problems.<sup>46</sup>

The growth of the Union of Evangelical Christians under the conditions of freedom was truly amazing. The membership rose from 8,472 members in 1914 to 250,000 in 1922.<sup>47</sup> The February democratic revolution of 1917 which ended the monarchical rule in Russia, brought about more freedom for non-Orthodox believers, and their legal status became from that time on equal with that of the Orthodox church. Prokhanov understood that a favourable image with the authorities and a certain political lobby would be instrumental in order to reach his goals. He noted that most political parties in Russia were negative towards the Evangelical movement. The right wing parties supported Orthodoxy, and the left were against religion in general. He said that moderate or centrist parties did help the Evangelical cause. Inspired by the democratic goals of the February revolution proclaimed by the Provisional Government, Prokhanov became interested in politics. He founded a Christian political party *Voskresenie* (Resurrection), which later took part in the Russian parliamentary (*Duma*) elections. The party generally shared the political platform of the larger and wide-spread centrist party of Constitutional Democrats (known as *kadets*), but with an emphasis on spiritual and ethical aspects. Interestingly, some of the party's goals sounded rather utopian, for

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<sup>46</sup> See *Evangel'skaia vera*, 5 (1932) 5-7.

<sup>47</sup> Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*, 56; Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, 119.

example, a call to unite all countries into a Worldwide Union of States.<sup>48</sup> The party existed till October of 1917 when the Bolshevik revolution practically put an end to the political pluralism in Russia.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the Communist authorities were quite tolerant towards religion till the late 1920s. In fact, in the first decade of the Soviet regime sectarian movements even improved their situations compared to the pre-Revolutionary period.<sup>50</sup> Evangelical Christians, just as other religious bodies, had the right to preach, own property, and publish books and periodicals. Pacifist believers could apply for non-combatant civil service in lieu of military draft, and those who believed in communal living established numerous intentional collective farms. They were frequently supported by the government, because communal ownership and labour resembled the Communist ideal of collective work and sharing. The famous City of Gospel (*Evangel'sk*) project of a large urban Christian communal settlement in southern Siberia championed by Prokhanov, also belongs to that period of relative religious freedom.<sup>51</sup> According to Nikol'skaia, first communal enterprises of Evangelical Christians emerged as early as 1918, although sectarian collective farms and communes became a part of the Soviet government policies from 1920.<sup>52</sup>

Prokhanov as well as later generations of Slavic Evangelical Christians emphasized their apolitical stance. In his biography Prokhanov mentioned that he only

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<sup>48</sup> On Prokhanov's political views see Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 144-45. Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast' v 1905-1991 godakh (Russian Protestantism and State Power 1905-1991)* (Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta, 2009), 52-53.

<sup>49</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 171-177. On the City of the Sun see also Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1961), 291-293 and Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 70.

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 155-56.

<sup>51</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 231-232.

<sup>52</sup> Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 70.

ran for a parliamentary seat “in the interest of the Evangelical cause.”<sup>53</sup> Nikol’skaia questioned the authenticity of this claim and asserted that Prokhanov in reality went through a passion for politics, and even for Communism, although the latter passion, in her opinion, was hardly sincere. In his Autobiography Prokhanov pointed to the unprecedented freedom former religious dissenters enjoyed during the first years of the Soviet rule. He credited the Bolshevik authorities for “securing religious liberties for the citizens of the Soviet Republics” and “granting real religious freedom.”<sup>54</sup> He remarked that “if Lenin had lived there would not have been such a terrible persecution.”

Nikol’skaia somewhat sarcastically wrote about Prokhanov’s “compliments to the Soviet rule” found, as she believed, in his Autobiography. She ironically remarked that “the only thing left for the author [Prokhanov] was to thank the Soviet authorities for his own arrest [in 1923].” In our opinion, irony in this case is not appropriate. Prokhanov wrote his Autobiography outside the USSR, and it was first published in New York in 1933. Surely, under such circumstances nothing could have made him contradict his conscience or his sense of objectivity. Besides, where applicable, he just as well wrote about the “terrible persecution” believers in the USSR had to endure in the 1930s. Apparently, Prokhanov genuinely perceived the 1920s as the time of great hopes and expectations.

Prokhanov remained the honorary chairman of the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians even after he left Russia in 1928. In the same year at the World Baptist Alliance congress in Toronto, Prokhanov was not re-elected as a Vice-president of the WBA. Wilhelm Kahle suggested that it was not a personal attack on Prokhanov

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<sup>53</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 172.

<sup>54</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 176.

who, after all, had been holding that position since 1911.<sup>55</sup> Rather, WBA was aware that Prokhanov no longer represented a strong and growing church in Russia. Ivan Prokhanov died in Berlin in 1935.

### **Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR after Prokhanov**

In spite of repeated attempts if not to merge, at least to co-ordinate the efforts, the relationship between the Baptists and Evangelical Christians in the USSR in 1920s and 1930s was deteriorating. Even the shared threat of the atheist governmental repression in the 1930s did not cause the two Unions to reconsider their increasing alienation from each other. A letter to all communities of the Evangelical Christians and their missionary workers of 1932 signed by all prominent leaders of the Evangelical Christians, namely Iakov Zhidkov (the future President of the AUCECB!), Aleksei Andreev, Mikhail Orlov, Aleksandr Karev, entirely devoted to the relationship with the Baptists, is more than explicit about it. “We are the guardians who stand on top of the watchtower, and, having noticed a threat, we must send a warning. Our brothers and sisters in different localities have accustomed in the past, due to various talks about unity, to regard Baptists as a kindred and close [movement]. In many aspects of the teaching it is so. But this closeness, given all their errors, is all the more what urges us to warn the Evangelical Christians about their errors.”<sup>56</sup> A seven-page document goes on pointing to those errors.

Firstly, Baptists are accused of a non-Biblical name, since Baptists, according to the document, was initially a nickname given to a sect by their adversaries. Moreover, the authors asserted that Baptists somehow “mocked” the name of the Evangelical Christians.

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<sup>55</sup> Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion (Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union)*. (Oncken Verlag: Wuppertal und Kassel, 1978), 214.

<sup>56</sup> AUCECB Archives, Folder 1d-1.2.

Secondly, the document declared the Baptist tradition of laying of hands on the newly baptized members an error. Thirdly, the Baptist practice that only ordained ministers may perform rituals such as baptisms or breaking of bread was considered erroneous. Fourthly, the document accused the Baptists of the privileged status that ordained ministers enjoyed among them. Then, Baptists were declared guilty of slander against Ivan Prokhanov personally. Lastly, the letter condemned the modernism of the greater Baptist community, naming specifically the World Baptist Alliance as an organization infected with theological modernism. The document urged the Evangelical Christians to be cautious and aware of the dangers of the Baptists (their negative influence was even compared to that of the Pentecostals). Former Baptists who applied for membership in communities of the Evangelical Christians were to be accepted only after a probation period.<sup>57</sup>

The situation for members and leadership of both branches of the Russian Protestantism was increasingly difficult in 1932. Mass arrests, imprisonment, or exile of religious activists and rank and file believers were well underway.<sup>58</sup> However, the rivalry and tension between the two branches did not cease. Such a document would be impossible to explain by any external pressures, since both movements were in a very similar situation, and the government at that time had no plans to unite the two movements, but rather, hoped to destroy them altogether.

The Union of Baptists in the USSR ceased to exist as a legal entity in 1935, while the Union of Evangelical Christians existed legally throughout the hard decade of the 1930s. The legally functioning Union of Evangelical Christians became a shared harbour for both Evangelical Christians and Baptists after the Union of Baptists had been

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<sup>57</sup> AUCECB Archives, Folder 1d-1.2.

<sup>58</sup> Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 101-105.

dissolved. Many local Baptist groups and individual Baptist believers joined existing churches of Evangelical Christians. Of course, many Baptist churches still existed illegally or semi-legally throughout the USSR, so the Baptist movement, although deprived of their headquarters, was still part of the religious landscape.<sup>59</sup>

Ironically, the unity that seemingly was too hard to achieve via negotiations, was attained in a short time and without hindrance by the order of Joseph Stalin. Iakov Zhidkov, who was so critical of the Baptists in 1932, became the head of the united church of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in 1944.<sup>60</sup> The story of the AUCECB is beyond the scope of this research. However, according to some scholars, the differences between the constituent parts of the Union were still felt decades thereafter.<sup>61</sup> In the early 1960s, when a major split occurred within the AUCECB over the issue of compliance with the governmental interference with church life, there re-emerged groups of “pure Baptists.” According to Leon McBeth, the 1960s split occurred primarily along the lines of Evangelical Christians versus Baptists, where the former overwhelmingly remained in registered churches, while the latter favoured the separation.<sup>62</sup> However, Tatiana Nikol’skaia did not support this view, and explained the split of the 1960s as a grass-roots movement of church activists and members, often of younger generation, against the rigid structure of the church, strengthened government control, and violation of basic

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<sup>59</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener ON, Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1981), 47-48.

<sup>60</sup> Durasoff, *Russian Protestants*, 104-107.

<sup>61</sup> See Gerhard Simon, *Church, State and Opposition in the U.S.S.R.* (London: C. Hurst, 1974), 157.

<sup>62</sup> Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (B & H Publishing Group, 1987), 817. See also a historical overview at the website of the Odessa Evangelical Baptist church at [www.400.baptist.od.ua](http://www.400.baptist.od.ua) (URL accessed on 20 August, 2010).

principles of Evangelical Christians and Baptists by both the AUCECB and the Soviet authorities.<sup>63</sup>

### **Core Topics of the Evangelical Christian Vision**

There are some core topics of the Slavic Evangelical discourse clearly discernible in the periodicals published by Evangelical Christians at different times, both before and after Prokhanov's death, such as *Khristianin* (until 1928, Saint Petersburg/Leningrad), *Evangel'skaia vera* (1931-1940, New York, Berlin, and Tallinn), and *Evangel'skoe slovo* (1962-1977, Chicago). They are reformation, a special vision for the Slavic peoples, spiritual continuity of the Evangelical Christianity, strict non-denominationalism with a closely related emphasis on spiritual and administrative independence, and social utopia.

As the movement of Evangelical Christians crystallized as a distinct branch of Protestantism in the early 1900's, it needed to place itself within the ranks of historical Protestant Christianity. The closeness between Evangelical Christians and other Protestant movements was obvious. At the same time, from the point of view of Evangelical Christians, historical Protestant Reformation failed to achieve its goals. The 1932 prayer week called Evangelical Christians to pray for "so called Protestant Christian churches," which emerged through the reformation during the time of Hus, Luther, and Zwingli, but "are now in a great decline." The decline is attributed to the "spirit of rationalism and politics," and resulted in a virtual stop of mission.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the historical Reformation in Europe was insufficient: "Successors of the reformers must have gone

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<sup>63</sup> Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 201-215.

<sup>64</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 12 (1932): 5.

further... Consequently, traditions, formalism, hierarchism, ignoring of the social side of the life crawled into the Reformation churches.”<sup>65</sup>

The parallels Evangelical Christians saw between themselves and historical reformers prompted them to work towards, or, at least, dream about, a reformation of the Orthodox church, just as historical reformers strove to reform the Roman Catholic church. The success of Evangelical Christians during the period of the relative religious freedom in the 1920s was described in terms of conversion of Orthodox priesthood and hierarchs to the Evangelical faith. “The power of Gospel was such, that priests of the Orthodox church began to turn to Christ, others started to give away their churches to the meetings of Evangelical Christians, and ask our preachers to preach in their temples.”<sup>66</sup>

Characteristically, a report on a missionary trip of an Evangelical Christian leader to western Canada in the mid 1930s, bore a name “Even an Orthodox Priest Greeted [the Preacher].” The report informed that a local Orthodox priest in a locality of Viceroy in Saskatchewan attended a meeting of Evangelical Christians, and greeted the preacher.<sup>67</sup>

The complete reformation, thus, was beginning in the Slavic lands, and, being an independent of foreign churches movement, bore distinct Slavic elements. Time and again periodicals of Evangelical Christians reiterated the idea that their mission was directed in the first place towards the Slavic peoples. While the first article of the first issue of *Evangel'skaia vera* had the title “Christ and the Humankind,” the following article was called “Christ and the Russian People.”<sup>68</sup> The Evangelical Christian

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<sup>65</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1933): 11.

<sup>66</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 20. Same motive are apparent in Prokhanov's Autobiography, see *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 210-16.

<sup>67</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932): 14.

<sup>68</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 2.

movement was depicted as a Good Samaritan, sent by God to give Russia spiritual healing and material prosperity. “The Gospel Call,” signed by Ivan Prokhanov and the USA Slavic Evangelical leader I.F. Shevchuk, urged fellow believers: “Almost wherever you live there are Russian or other Slavic souls. You must know how to approach them to proclaim Gospel to them.”<sup>69</sup> At the same time the New York community called to Christ “the entire Slavic nation.”<sup>70</sup> Some thirty years later a report from the Buenos Aires, Argentina sent to *Evangel'skoe slovo* by Roman Khil'chuk read: “By Lord's grace, for twenty-five years the Buenos Aires church has been bringing the Gospel message to the Slavic people.”<sup>71</sup> Argentina was a predominantly Roman Catholic country, and, therefore, there were many people in the need of conversion. All or most members of the church had been living in Argentina for a long time or had been born there and, thus, were fluent in Spanish. Yet, the Buenos Aires church still saw its primary goal in preaching to the Slavic population, not unlike many conservative Canadian Mennonites, who limited their mission outreach to scattered people of Mennonite descent or speakers of German.<sup>72</sup>

The very fact that Evangelical Christians saw themselves as having if not material, then spiritual link to the historical Reformation in Europe, suggested the great role spiritual continuity played for them. In accordance to their vision of the Slavic reformation, the image of Jan Hus, the Czech reformer of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the predecessor of the Moravian Church was of a special significance. An article on a visit to a Moravian Brethren community near Magdeburg in Germany by Prokhanov was published in *Evangel'skaia vera*, where the Moravian church was praised as “the blessed

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<sup>69</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 8-9 (1932): 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Evangel'skoe slovo* 88 (1964): 27.

<sup>72</sup> Bruce Guenther, “Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites” in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 232

fruit of the reform activity of Jan Hus.”<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere in the magazine Hus was called “the first evangelical reformer and martyr in Europe.”<sup>74</sup> Apparently, Slavic Evangelicals liked to regard themselves as heirs of the brave Slavic hero of faith.

Evangelical Christians emphasized their Pashkovite roots. If Vasilii Pashkov died in 1902, another early Pashkovite leader, Modest Korf, settled in Switzerland following his banishment from Russia in 1884. Evangelical Christians in the USSR regained contact with him only in 1927. The April 1927 issue of *Khristianin* published letters to Prokhanov and to the Evangelical Christians sent by Modest Korf, a veteran of the Evangelical revival in St. Petersburg banished from Russia together with Vasilii Pashkov. Korf was called “a prominent [evangelical] activists of the time” and “a veteran fighter for the freedom of consciousness in Russia.”<sup>75</sup> Korf, in his turn, asserted that he was “separated from you [Evangelical Christians in the USSR] only by an earthly distance.” Korf, according to him, continued preaching among “compatriots”, apparently Russian-speaking immigrants, in Switzerland. Contacts with Korf continued until his death in 1933, and Korf’s letters to Evangelical Christians were regularly published. Nearly 90 years old at that time Korf came to be an icon of the movement, symbolizing a life entirely devoted to Christ and a testimony to the link between the St. Petersburg revival of the 1870s and contemporary Evangelical Christians. In July, 1933 the magazine published a note “The Remarkable 90 Year Anniversary” devoted to Korf’s birthday and a short edifying story by Korf.<sup>76</sup> The death of Modest Korf that occurred in November,

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<sup>73</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 2 (1933): 23.

<sup>74</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10 (1933): 13.

<sup>75</sup> *Khristianin*, 4 (1927): 58-60.

<sup>76</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1932): 14.

1933 was marked by a lengthy and eulogistic obituary.<sup>77</sup> In 1939 the magazine published a memoir about Modest Korf by a reader from Finland.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, drawing on the authority of such well known and respected Christian evangelical activists as Wesley, Boots, Finney, Moody, and Spurgeon constituted a claim of the Evangelical Christians for a spiritual continuity of the world evangelicalism of which they were an inalienable part.

Non-denominationalism, that is, a non-alignment with any of the existing denominations of historical Christianity, was a matter of principle for Slavic Evangelicals. According to “The Brotherly Word,” collectively signed by all Evangelical leaders, “the free evangelical church in Russia is not a sect... Treasuring its achievements in the spiritual life, it nevertheless admits that... the universal Triumphant Church will consist of the pious ones from all nations, tribes, and all religious organizations.”<sup>79</sup> Periodicals of Evangelical Christians of all periods had a marked tendency to avoid, unless absolutely necessary, references to the names of Protestant denominations. Prokhanov’s strange reluctance to even mention Baptists in his Autobiography was pointed out earlier. However, this tendency was not limited to Prokhanov alone or to the period when Prokhanov was the leader. Materials published in *Khristianin* of the 1920s practically never contained any references to any Christian denominations other than Evangelical Christians even when such a reference would have been relevant. For instance, well-known Christian preachers or activists, such as William Booth (the founder of the Salvation Army), or famous Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, whose sermons *Khristianin* regularly published, were called simply Christians with no reference to their

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<sup>77</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1 (1934): 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-12 (1939): 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1933): 15.

denominational affiliation. Interestingly, materials published by *Evangel'skoe slovo* in the 1960s much in the same manner carefully avoided references to specific denominations. While the movement participated in many joint initiatives with evangelicals of many types, the magazine contained almost no reference to any denomination whatsoever. For example, a report on the “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” of Evangelical Christians that took place in May, 1962 in Vancouver, Canada, mentioned greetings received “from brothers and sisters in Russia.”<sup>80</sup> Those by necessity must have been members of the joint church of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, the fact omitted in the report. English-speaking guests at Slavic Evangelical events of the period were never referred to by the name of their denomination in the magazine. Closely related to non-denominationalism is the emphasized independence of Evangelical Christians from other church structures. Overall, Evangelical Christians regarded themselves as more consistent reformers than most Western Christians. “The independent character of the Evangelical movement explains the fact that it has gone much further than western reformations [sic!]. The Russian Free Evangelical church at this point is not identical with any other group on earth, although akin to many of them.”<sup>81</sup>

Finally, the Slavic Evangelical movement contained an element of social and religious utopia. This fact was noted by Tat'iana Nikol'skaia in her discussion of Prokhanov's social ideal and flirting with the idea of Christian communism during the early 1920s.<sup>82</sup> Later, in the diaspora, the utopian component persisted. At least twice over the course of a few years *Evangel'skaia vera* published Prokhanov's article on the creation of a new, Evangelical culture. Some of its precepts vividly remind of

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<sup>80</sup> *Evangel'skoe slovo*, 82 (1962): 27.

<sup>81</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1933): 16.

<sup>82</sup> Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 70.

Campanella's *City of Sun* or Bacon's *New Atlantis*. For instance, Evangelical Christians were supposed to marry early, their clothes needed to be of light colours, their houses were to have houses for birds and flowers in windows, etc.<sup>83</sup> At least some Evangelical Christians in the diaspora heeded these recommendations. Brother Mazurin from Canada wrote in his letter to the editor regarding the Evangelical culture: "I find it necessary that all Evangelical churches apply these rules. Through the Evangelical culture we will attain the Gospel life, intelligent, pure, and joyful."<sup>84</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The distinction between the Slavic Baptists and Evangelical Christians lay not only in subtle theological disagreements. In fact, there were also distinctions between two approaches and two visions. One of them was more exclusive, denominational, based upon well-defined articles of faith and rules, often dependent upon Western assistance and guidance, and lacking interest in the political activism. The other was decidedly non-denominational, advocating unity of the like-minded, relatively loose theologically, independent of foreign control, and focussed upon overall religious, political, and social reformation.

Evangelical Christians, irrespective of their ethnicity, were heirs of the Evangelical tradition started by Pashkov and Korf, and continued by Ivan Prokhanov. They never were just an ethnic or local branch of another, larger and influential religious body. They felt themselves participants in a major project with social, political, and cultural implications. However, Russia did not become a land of Gospel Christianity, and

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<sup>83</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1933): 14.

<sup>84</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932): 16.

there was no mass conversion of Slavic peoples to the Gospel Christianity. After the deadly blow of Stalinist repression in the USSR in the late 1920s and 1930s, the Slavic Evangelical churches in the diaspora became the centre of the movement and the last hope of Prokhanov who still believed that they still had the capacity to become the seed of a new Reformation.

### **Chapter III. Ivan Prokhanov and Slavic Evangelical Christians outside Russia and the USSR**

This chapter will outline the history of Evangelical Christians in the diaspora, after the break-up of the Russian Empire in 1917. First believers representing the Slavic Evangelical tradition, followers of Pashkov, resettled outside Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, only after the Russian Revolution Slavic Evangelical Christians became a truly international or, rather, a transnational phenomenon. Transnationalism, understood in its most basic meaning, in the words of Steven Vertovec, as “the awareness of multilocality,”<sup>1</sup> is increasingly regarded as a useful approach in the study of immigrant groups and immigrant identities. Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen have recently explored transnationalism as part of the immigrant experience on the Canadian Prairies, which, as they argued, “increasingly charted their lives within social and cultural webs that had not just one centre, but two or even three.”<sup>2</sup> The new nest in Canada might serve as one point of reference, yet, the “gravitation centres” of the immigrant experiences often included the home country and, sometimes, a third country with which immigrants had economic, spiritual or other ties.

The transnationalist dimension is a highly useful approach to history of and the developments within the movement of Slavic Evangelicals in the diaspora. The movement as a collective body and many families and individual members that comprised it, especially in the period after both Russian Revolutions of 1917, coped with

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 157.

the feeling of “simultaneously being... ‘here and there.’”<sup>3</sup> Cut off from their historical centre in St. Petersburg (Petrograd, then Leningrad), and from hundreds of thousands of their fellow-believers in the USSR, Slavic Evangelicals organized their national or local communities and unions from China to Paraguay, and from Canada to Australia, always claiming to be parts of the one Slavic Evangelical movement. Ivan Prokhanov, hectically living between Berlin, Poland, Bulgaria, New York, Chicago, Toronto, and Canadian Prairies, strove to shape those communities and unions into one manageable organization. The official periodical of the Union, *Evangel'skaia vera*, changed three places of publication (New York, then Berlin, and, finally, Tallinn, Estonia) in nine years from 1931 to 1940, while an increasing number of Slavic Evangelical Christians from Europe were making their new homes in Canada or Argentina. These recent settlers might simultaneously be ethnic Ukrainians, former Orthodox, Polish citizens, former subjects of the Russian Empire, Manitoba farmers, and members of a church of Slavic Evangelical Christians, who, on top of that, immigrated to Canada after years of life in South America.<sup>4</sup> They at the same time felt deeply and genuinely worried about grain prices in Canada, helping to erect a new prayer house for a Slavic Evangelical church in Paraguay, members of which might be their cousins or former neighbours, closure of Evangelical Christian churches in Moscow by Soviet authorities, and the exchange rate of Canadian dollar to Polish zloty for their remittances to family back home.

In spite of the overshadowing significance of Ivan Prokhanov for Slavic Evangelical Christians during the first thirty-five years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the movement was sustainable enough to continue its existence and activities for generations beyond

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<sup>3</sup> Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Loewen and Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities*, 168-69.

Prokhanov's death. The movement of Evangelical Christians, with its specific focus and vision, did not begin with Prokhanov. It started much earlier with the revival, ignited by Lord Radstock, and was carried on by Pashkov and Korf. Likewise, the death of Prokhanov did not signify the death of the movement. Communities existed in a number of countries at least until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the movement published periodicals, led missionary work, and readily engaged itself in interdenominational activities and such new methods of mission as radio broadcasting. The late 1940s and 1950s, that is, a decade or two after the death of Prokhanov were the period of the numerical peak of the movement in the diaspora.<sup>5</sup>

The reasons for the decline of the movement from the late 1950s or the 1960s onwards are to be sought on the path of transnational developments across the borders. The 1944 fusion of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR meant that the hope to reunite with the core membership in Russia "when the door opens" faded. Annexation of western Ukraine, western Belorussia, and Baltic States in 1939 and 1940 by the USSR signified that large masses of Slavic Evangelical Christians in those countries would have to join the new Evangelical Baptist union under the tight control of the Soviet rulers. Communities in Harbin, China, were dispersed following the Communist Revolution in China in 1949. Communities in South America were decimated over the post-war years because of continuing economic and political turmoil in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, when many members chose to emigrate elsewhere.

Of course, all these events *per se* could not destroy the movement. After all, many Evangelical Christians from China or Argentina were able to make it to North America,

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter VII of this thesis for a detailed discussion of Slavic Evangelical Christians and North American evangelicalism.

while the USA and Canadian communities grew richer as their members overwhelmingly joined North American middle class.<sup>6</sup> But what these events inadvertently signified was that the impulse at the core of the movement had failed. Slavic Evangelical Christians did not become the seed of the worldwide renewal of Christianity. The movement failed to convert a significant portion of the Russian or East Slavic population in exile. The members lost hope to ever spiritually and organizationally reunite with their brethren in the USSR or to be able to preach in that country. Finally, a high level of interdenominational integration of the movement with dominant evangelical culture in North America tacitly destroyed remaining barriers with the rest of evangelicals.

The main primary sources for this overview of the history of Slavic Evangelicals are periodicals of Evangelical Christians, published in different places at different times. They are *Khristianin* (until 1928, Saint Petersburg/Leningrad), *Evangel'skaia vera* (1931-1940, New York, Berlin, and Tallinn), and *Evangel'skoe slovo* (1962-1975, Chicago). For the purposes of this chapter *Evangel'skaia vera* is, perhaps, the most useful source, since it covers the efforts to re-group and reshape the movement in diaspora both by Prokhanov and after his death, and will be used most extensively.

### **Ivan Prokhanov and Slavic Evangelical Christians Worldwide**

Two historical developments particularly contributed to the global spread of the Evangelical Christian movement. One of them was the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which caused an enormous outflow of refugees and emigrants from the former Russian Empire, mostly for political, but also for economical, religious, family, and other reasons.

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<sup>6</sup> On similar developments among Canadian Mennonites in the post-war period see Ted Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*. Vol. 3 of *Mennonites in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 166-68.

The other was the phenomenon of mass Ukrainian emigration to the New World at the turn of the centuries and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which was especially important for the Canadian churches of Evangelical Christians. Although economics was at the core of the latter development, such factors as discrimination against Ukrainians in Austro-Hungary and, especially, Poland (after it regained its independence in 1918) and, in some cases, political and personal considerations also played their role.

After the Revolution of 1917 Slavic Evangelical churches were founded in many countries across the globe. A necessity was felt to re-establish ties among them, cut off by political events. The editorial article in the first issue of *Evangel'skaia vera* called the diaspora Evangelical Christians: “Whichever organizations may be helping you [in exile], be thankful to all, but do not depart from the purity of the Gospel faith, confessed by the evangelical movement in Russia... When the doors to Russia open, the evangelical movement there and the evangelical movement here in exile will turn into one great global river.”<sup>7</sup> The magazine *Evangel'skaia vera* was thought of as “the linking chain in this great unification... Let a brother, living in Shanghai, China suddenly, through the magazine, hear the voice of a brother from Chicago or Brazil.”<sup>8</sup>

Dozens of the communities of Prokhanov's Union were founded in newly independent Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The Polish branch of the movement was especially strong and numerous. A Conference of the “Union of Slavic Communities of Evangelical Christians in Poland” which took place in Rovno (now Ukraine) in May, 1931, hosted 120 delegates from 49 communities with the total of 5117 members.<sup>9</sup> The word “Slavic” in the name of the organization, of course, denoted a multinational

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<sup>7</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 2 (1931): 12.

character of the Union. Although Ukrainians were a majority, many Belorussians and Poles were also members of local churches. In fact, some of the leaders of the Polish church of the time, such as Liudvig Shenderovskii Sr. (Pol. *Ludwig Szenderowski*) and Frants Ventskevich (Pol. *Franciszek Więckiewicz*) were ethnic Poles of Roman Catholic background.<sup>10</sup> News from the “Polish field” were regularly published in *Evangel'skaia vera*, and included reports of spiritual and business conferences, charitable undertakings such as the church-run orphanage in the city of Kovel’ (now Ukraine),<sup>11</sup> and youth and literary church clubs,<sup>12</sup> among other activities. Communities in Estonia and Latvia were also vital. A community in Revel’ (now Tallinn, Estonia) emerged long before the Revolution of 1917, due to its proximity to the centre of the movement in St. Petersburg. After the Estonian independence (1918) the small country became home to thousands of Russian refugees.<sup>13</sup> The Riga (Latvia) community was growing, and had a choir and a youth group.<sup>14</sup>

Personal involvement of Ivan Prokhanov gave an impulse to the founding of the Evangelical Union in Bulgaria in the early 1930s. Its members were ethnic Bulgarians, Macedonians, and Turks.<sup>15</sup> A letter from “brother Kv.” from Bulgaria greeted the appearance of the new magazine, and assured that it would “find open doors in the hearts and homes of Russians and Bulgarian brothers who understand Russian.”<sup>16</sup> Local Slavs were a missionary target, all the more that the Slavic Bulgarian language was relatively easy to learn, and due to the traditional friendliness of Bulgarian population towards

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<sup>10</sup> See biography of Shenderovskii Sr. in *Evangel'skaia vera*, 8 (1933): 25-26, and a biography of F. Ventskevich in Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 437-39.

<sup>11</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4-6 (1938): 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 8 (1933): 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 5 (1932): 13-14.

<sup>14</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1932): 15.

<sup>15</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 286-290.

<sup>16</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 3 (1931): 10.

Russians. An anonymous report from Bulgaria informed that “a revival is noticeable among Macedonians and Thracian. I organize gatherings in the village K., in attendance of 150 and more souls.”<sup>17</sup> Vital churches, including a community of Jewish Evangelical Christians, existed in Romania.<sup>18</sup>

Evangelical Russian post-Revolutionary immigrants and refugees in Europe founded communities in Germany. In 1927 the community of Evangelical Christians in Berlin reported that it needed at least thirty copies of *Khristianin* for its members.<sup>19</sup> Later Berlin became one of the two (along with New York) headquarters of the Slavic Evangelical Christians abroad. Prokhanov spent his last years following his departure from Russia (1928-1935) traveling between Berlin and New York, and visiting Evangelical communities worldwide. The large Berlin church had a choir, and was dynamically expanding. One report said that on one occasion four new converts were baptized at once.<sup>20</sup> From May, 1932 Berlin became the place of the publication of *Evangel'skaia vera*.

Immigrants from Slavic lands founded in the 1920s a strong network of Slavic Evangelical churches in South America, which was at that time an important destination for European immigrants. Most of those churches were in Argentina, with some in Uruguay, Paraguay, and Brazil. The large Buenos Aires church included a youth groups which organized literary nights and had a string orchestra. The Sao Paulo, Brazil, church was much smaller. As of 1932 it counted twenty-seven members.<sup>21</sup> Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay were important centres of the Ukrainian agricultural immigration from the

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<sup>17</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 2 (1931): 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1932): 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Khristianin*, 5 (1927): 42, 43.

<sup>20</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 3 (1931): 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1932): 12.

1880s. Many Slavic believers lived outside large cities, and were not organized into regular churches.<sup>22</sup>

Churches of Slavic Evangelical Christians existed in China and Australia.<sup>23</sup> Brother Rodkin from Harbin, China informed that “meetings at the new premises are numerous; we have conversions.”<sup>24</sup> In September, 1931 the Chinese branch of the Evangelical Christian movement was officially organized. It united communities and groups in Harbin, the centre of the Russian diaspora in northern China at the time, in Hailar, Shanghai, and other cities. The missionary outreach was focused upon Russians, but not limited to them. Rodkin contacted a group of Tunghus (a semi-nomadic indigenous ethnic group in the borderlands of Russian Siberia and northern China), and preached Gospel to them.<sup>25</sup>

The USA was an important centre of the Evangelical Christians in the diaspora from the early 1900s. Communities in Chicago and New York were especially influential.<sup>26</sup> The worship premises of the Chicago church were emblematically known as The Gospel House (Rus. *Dom Evangeliiia*).<sup>27</sup> Prokhanov first visited the USA in his young adult years, and had returned to that country for short or prolonged stays many times since. A 1927 issue contained a lengthy and detailed report of Prokhanov’s trip to North America mentioned on numerous occasions that Prokhanov attended and even preached in local Protestant churches. They included “like-minded spiritual societies and brotherhoods,” “Negro (*negritianskie*) Christian communities,” “gatherings of blacks and

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<sup>22</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 2 (1931): 12.

<sup>23</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 302-316, 348.

<sup>24</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 3 (1931): 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1932): 13.

<sup>26</sup> See a letter from the New York community of Evangelical Christians in *Khristianin* 4 (1927): 62.

<sup>27</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932): 12.

whites,” and “groups and communities of Russian believers.” Characteristically, no church he visited was referred to by the name of its respective denomination. In 1931-32 Prokhanov lived in the USA continuously, working on the formation of a worldwide Union. Creation of the new magazine, *Evangel'skaia vera*, dated back to that prolonged visit. Some aspects of the Evangelical Christian history in the USA will be treated below, in a section devoted to their relationship with the church of the Disciples of Christ.

Prokhanov's dream was to convert all those scattered communities into what he envisioned as a Worldwide Union of Evangelical Christians. In fact, he thought that by the 1930s, following the establishment of the national unions in a dozen countries such a Worldwide Union had been already formed. Yet, he considered it impossible to officially proclaim the Worldwide Union when the contacts between the Evangelical Christians in the USSR and abroad were seriously curtailed.<sup>28</sup> Considering the political climate of the time, the Union of Evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union could hardly obtain permission from the Government to participate in an organization influenced, if not dominated, by Evangelical churches from capitalist countries.

The fate of the believers in the USSR was an unceasing theme on the pages of *Evangel'skaia vera*. Two permanent sections of the magazine, “News from Russia” and “Persecution in Russia” were filled with reports received through a wide spectrum of official and unofficial sources, from official telegrams to scant letters to stories told by rare refugees from or visitors to the USSR. Carefully avoiding any direct political criticism, the magazine expressed a deep sympathy with fellow believers in the USSR and denounced Soviet religious (and, incidentally, political) persecutions. The “News” part primarily contained information received through official channels, and frequently

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<sup>28</sup> According to the spiritual will of Prokhanov quoted from Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 397.

was mildly optimistic. One report under the name “A Joyful News” informed that on 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1931 an officially permitted conference of the Council of Evangelical Christians took place in Moscow. According to another report from the north of Russia, a church was re-opened after seventeen months of closure, and worship meetings resumed. The “Persecution” section below contrasted sharply with the “News,” and contained mostly anonymous letters from various parts of the USSR. A believer from the Kiev province conveyed his collectivization experience in an apocalyptic language: “Such days have come for our country that you cannot describe them. They have taken from people everything they had: land, houses, all equipment, horses, cows, pigs, chicken, all food, freedom, and soul. The enemy has taken everything and wants everyone to bow before him. But this will not be!”<sup>29</sup> The church in the USSR, although communication with it was intermittent, was still listed on the pages of *Evangel'skaia vera* as a part of the one church along with diasporic branches.<sup>30</sup>

### **Slavic Evangelical Christians and the Disciples of Christ**

Numerous Slavic Evangelical communities appeared in the USA where John Johnson-Kondrat'ev became the first chairman of the USA branch of Prokhanov's Union. The personality and life story of John Johnson was interwoven with another important, but little-known episode in the history of Evangelical Christians, their connections to the American restorationist movement of the Disciples of Christ (Church of Christ).<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 3 (1931): 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932): 32.

<sup>31</sup> The history of relationship between Slavic Gospel Christians and the American Disciples of Christ was studied by two Disciple historians, Geoffrey Ellis and Wesley Jones. The result of their research, which included two trips to Russia, was published as a book entitled *The Other Revolution. Russian Evangelical Awakenings* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996). Although being designed more as a popular historical book than an academic work, *The Other Revolution* nevertheless drew upon numerous archival materials and

Disciples movement that advocated the return to the New Testament and the primitive church of the apostolic times emerged in the USA in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Second Great Awakening. Among the most important tenets of the Disciples is the absence of written creeds while the believers are only required to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and undergo baptism by immersion. The Disciples have always made a special effort to remain non-denominational and never proclaimed that belonging to their community was essential for salvation. They have been active in the ecumenical movement of Christian churches. The motto of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Disciples was the following saying of St. Augustine: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.” This phrase Prokhanov chose for the slogan of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians. However, the links between the American Disciples and Slavic Evangelical Christians go far beyond using the same motto.<sup>32</sup>

The first Disciple mission for Slavic-speaking people and the first Russian Disciple church were founded in New York by a Pahkovite believer Ivan Kondrat’ev who was exiled to Transcaucasia in 1893 with his father, and managed to immigrate to the USA in 1903. He anglicized his name upon naturalization and became known as John Johnson. In 1904 John Johnson (Kondrat’ev) joined the Disciples of Christ. In 1910 his Russian Christian Mission in New York City grew enough to become a church.

Aleksandr Persianov, a prominent missionary worker of the Union of Evangelical Christians, met Johnson-Kondrat’ev’s father on one of his missionary trips in Siberia. The father told Persianov about his son’s missionary work in America among Slavic people, and Persianov started a correspondence with Johnson. As a result Timofei

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hard to find contemporary sources, including the Disciple press dating back to the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>32</sup> Ellis, Jones, *The Other Revolution*, 142.

Davydov, an elder of the Russian Disciple church in New York, attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of Evangelical Christians in 1911 and spoke to the delegates. Besides, leaders of the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS) and the Disciples' Mission Union sent telegrams of greetings to the Congress. In 1912 Joseph Keevil of the Disciples' Mission Union wrote a letter to Ivan Prokhanov asking him to outline the faith of the Evangelical Christians. Prokhanov answered the letter, and as a result Prokhanov and two representatives of the Evangelical Christians, Persianov and Schmidt, attended the annual meeting of the ACMS. Prokhanov addressed the gathering with a speech. The American Disciples formed a Russian Emergency Committee that set a goal of collecting 5000 dollars towards the expenses of setting up the Bible College in Saint Petersburg, an initiative of Ivan Prokhanov. The chairman of the Committee was Z.T. Sweeney who considered Evangelical Christians a very likeminded group.<sup>33</sup> He wrote, "There is no doubt that these Evangelical Christians of Russia are our own spiritual kith and kin. They are the Disciples of Christ in Russia."<sup>34</sup> The funds collected by the Disciples (slightly over \$5000) were used towards the expenses of the Bible College.

The years of the First World War (1914-1918) and the Russian Civil War (1917-early 1920s) interrupted the dialogue between the Disciples and Evangelical Christians for a time. It resumed immediately after the Civil War was over. The American Disciples helped Russia during the famine that struck parts of the country following the end of the Civil War. In 1923 Karl Borders, a Disciple leader and relief worker from Chicago visited Russia to get acquainted with the Evangelical Christians and evaluate whether their beliefs and practices were identical to those of the Disciples. Another delegation of

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<sup>33</sup> Ellis, Jones, *The Other Revolution*, 148-50.

<sup>34</sup> Ellis, Jones, *The Other Revolution*, 149.

the Disciples commissioners went to Russia again for the same purpose in 1925. Their practical aim was to determine whether the Disciples were to fund the Bible School of the Evangelical Christians and their other endeavours. Prokhanov, who happened to be in the USA in May, 1925, met members of that committee shortly before their departure for Russia. According to Ellis and Jones, “the American assessment was that the Russian Evangelical Christians were *neither Baptists nor Disciples* and, in significant points, were not fully restorationist according to the American standards.”<sup>35</sup> Thus the decision was made to refrain from any substantial funding of the Bible College, although the Disciples continued to help Prokhanov’s Union financially until the Stalinist reaction of late 1920s curtailed any contacts between the USSR and the West. This relationship, in a sense, illustrates the whole paradigm of the position of the Slavic Gospel Christians towards Western Protestants. On one hand, there is an obvious affinity and a great degree of similarity and mutual sympathy, but on the other hand, Western Protestants, be it Baptists or the Disciples of Christ, sensed that Slavic Gospel Christians were an alternative form of Protestantism. They saw that the Evangelical Christians, although invariably ready for co-operation, would never become part of their church structure or accept foreign control over their affairs. This inevitably led to cautious or scarce support of any kind, and, as a result, Slavic Evangelical Christians, unlike Slavic Baptists, had to rely upon themselves. The subsequent chapters will demonstrate how this paradigm played out in the case of Canadian Evangelical Christians, and, specifically, in the Benito church.

Andrew Blane and some other researchers of Russian religious dissent regarded Evangelical Christians as part of the Baptist movement based on the fact that Prokhanov and his collaborators took part in the activities of the World Baptist Alliance (Prokhanov

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<sup>35</sup> Ellis, Jones, *The Other Revolution*, 172.

was a long time Vice-President of the WBA). Now the question could arise whether participation in the Disciples of Christ activities (of which Andrew Blane was likely not aware), such as participation in their conferences as well as accepting funding from them was a good enough reason to consider them a part of the Disciples. The legitimate answer in both cases, of course, would be no. Slavic Evangelical Christians were neither Disciples nor Baptists, as it was noted by the Disciples' committee. However, their staunchly non-denominational stance and openness to contacts with anyone who proclaimed salvation through Christ allowed them a close association with those bodies, but that openness is not to be confused with their sameness.

A lengthy statement of faith and purpose of the Evangelical Christians under the title "A Brotherly Word to All Christian Churches and Confessions Worldwide" was signed by Ivan Prokhanov, Iakov Zhidkov, Ivan Kargel' and other leaders of the movement in the USSR in 1928. It was, according to Prokhanov, "made known" in 1930, but published only in 1933 in *Evangel'skaia vera*. It said: "As the construction of the Russian evangelical church began, there could have been a wish to simply accept the shape of an existing kindred church. Some groups of believers in Russia did so, having accepted the name and organization of a foreign confession... But the Apostolic plan tells not to move from elsewhere, but to build up a spiritual house. Maintaining our respect to all kindred Protestant churches..., we preferred an independent construction of a spiritual house."<sup>36</sup>

In the meantime the Slavic Disciple congregation in New York withdrew in 1925 to join the emerging Slavic Union of Evangelical Christians in America of which John Johnson (Kondrat'ev) became a President. A history of the Slavic Evangelical Christians

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<sup>36</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1933): 16.

by Liudvig Shenderovskii is silent on the links with the Disciples of Christ, although it contains a section devoted to John Johnson.<sup>37</sup> Shenderovskii called the Slavic community in New York “an evangelical church” without any mention of its links with the Disciples.<sup>38</sup> According to him, Johnson founded that church in 1907, and not in 1910 as indicated by Ellis and Jones, and was ordained as a minister (apparently, by the Disciples of Christ) in 1910. According to Shenderovskii, Johnson “in 1912 organized the first conference of Evangelical Christians in New York.” Johnson met Prokhanov in person only in 1931. They began co-operating, with Johnson “uniting” his magazine *Golos Evangeliiia* (Voice of the Gospel) with the *Evangel'skaia Vera* (The Gospel Faith) magazine, published by Prokhanov. Indeed, John Johnson was listed as an assistant editor of *Evangel'skaia vera* in 1931-32 until publication of the magazine was moved to Berlin. Finally, in the early 1930s he became an employee of the American branch of the Union of Evangelical Christians. In other words, Shenderovskii's account reads as if Johnson were an Evangelical Christian and there was a community of Slavic Evangelical Christians in New York even prior to the emergence of the Prokhanov's Union of Evangelical Christians in Russia! There is no reason to doubt the account of Ellis and Jones regarding Johnson, based on the Disciple sources of the period. Apparently, Shenderovskii did not pay enough attention to verifying Johnson's initial denominational affiliation, and, in all probability, did not know much about the movement of the Disciples of Christ/Christian Church in the USA. He must have taken the name “Christian Church” in whichever source he used as a descriptor or a modifier rather than as an official title of a denomination. On the other hand, Shenderovskii's confusion (as

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<sup>37</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 333-335.

<sup>38</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 333.

well as Johnson's behaviour) is very remarkable. Both cases illustrate the degree of openness of the Evangelical Christians towards other denominations, non-denominationalism, but also their unwillingness to compromise their independence in favour of a close affiliation with larger and richer religious organizations.

### **Slavic Evangelical Christians Worldwide after Prokhanov**

The only issue of *Evangel'skaia vera* that appeared in 1936 was devoted entirely to the memory of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov who died in October, 1935. It contained his detailed biography by Evangelical author and intellectual Vladimir Martsinkovskii,<sup>39</sup> obituaries written by Ludwig Jacques (also spelled Liudvig Zhak) and anonymous authors, and a lengthy "spiritual will" of Prokhanov, outlining the principles and tasks of the Evangelical Christian movement in the future. The Prokhanov's spiritual will, written in 1933 in Wernigerode, Germany, called for formation of new local and national unions of Evangelical Christians worldwide, intensified preaching and evangelization, and co-operation with other like-minded Christians, especially Baptists. Although preaching was to be focused on Russian and Slavic population, other nations were expected to convert through the preaching efforts of Evangelical Christians. Ludwig Jacques and Jakob Kroeker were designated as future chairman and deputy chairman of the Union.<sup>40</sup>

Among the numerous churches, organizations, and private persons who sent their condolences on the occasion of Prokhanov's death were the American Bible Society and the community of Doukhobors in Canada.<sup>41</sup> Following the death of Prokhanov in 1935 in Berlin, his successors in the Slavic Evangelical movement abroad decided to officially

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<sup>39</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera* 1-12 (1936): 4-14.

<sup>40</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera* 1-12 (1936): 10-14, also Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 390-97.

<sup>41</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera* 1-3 (1937): 3.

organize the Worldwide Union even though Evangelical Christians in the USSR had no opportunity to join that organizations or even participate in its activities. The Soviet branch of the movement was expected to join the new Union “when the doors to Russia open.” The decision to organize the Worldwide Union was taken in January 1936 under the leadership of Jakob Kroecker (also spelled Iakov Kreker) (1872-1948) and Ludwig Jacques (1878-1939), both Russian Evangelical activists of German origin.<sup>42</sup> Both Kroecker and Jacques became leaders of the movement in accordance with Prokhanov’s spiritual will.<sup>43</sup> The first conference of the new Fellowship was held on 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> of May, 1937 in Warsaw, Poland.<sup>44</sup> Of course, the imminent tragic war events in Europe stopped the Slavic Evangelical activities in most of Europe. In 1939 Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany, while the eastern part of the country, where most Evangelical Christians lived, was annexed by the Soviet Union and became part of Ukraine and Belorussia. In 1940 Estonia and Latvia, the countries that housed a considerable number of Evangelical Christians, were annexed by the USSR and became republics within the Soviet Union. Later Evangelical Christians residing in those lands had to join the AUCECB. Most Evangelical Christians remaining in Poland united in 1953 into one church with the Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals). The former headquarters of Evangelical Christians in Berlin was destroyed in 1944 by Ally airplanes bombing the city, and the archives that were stored in the building burnt down.<sup>45</sup> After the war many

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<sup>42</sup> Ludwig Jacques was born in Germany, graduated from the Faculty of Theology of the University at Halle, and arrived in Russia in 1906, where he remained until 1918 (see his biography in Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 449-50). Jakob Kroecker was a Russian-born Mennonite who immigrated to Germany in 1908, and devoted the rest of his life to the ministry among Russian-speaking people in the diaspora. His biography by A. Borisov was published in *Vera i zhizn’ (Faith and Life)* 5 (1996), and is available online at <http://www.lio.ru/archive/vera/96/05/article06.html> (URL accessed on August 24, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 391-397.

<sup>44</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 242-44; *Evangel’skaia vera* 10-12 (1937): 12-15.

<sup>45</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 292.

post-Revolutionary Russian exiles residing in Europe, including Evangelical believers, chose to immigrate to the Americas. The centre of the Worldwide Fellowship shifted to North America. At first the influx of the post-war Slavic newcomers kept the organization active, however from the 1960s onwards its membership and the range of its activities were constantly shrinking. The headquarters of the organization was moved to Chicago, Illinois and was incorporated as a charity under the name of the World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians Inc.<sup>46</sup> with *Evangel'skoe slovo* quarterly as its official magazine.

Each issue of *Evangel'skoe slovo* contained a list of established churches of Evangelical Christians in a number of countries. The list included as of the period from 1962 to 1966 seventeen churches in Canada, fourteen – in the USA, nine – in Argentina, two – in Finland, and one church each in Uruguay, Australia, and Switzerland. *Evangel'skoe slovo* of the period published a number of letters from affiliates or sympathizers of the Fellowship from different countries. Of course, most such letters and reports came from the countries and localities with existing Slavic Evangelical communities. Other, however, arrived from Russia (apparently, from anywhere in the USSR), France, Poland, Germany, and Brazil. For readers in such countries as Brazil and France receiving *Evangel'skoe slovo* in the mail was the main way to maintain contact with the larger body of Slavic Evangelicals. I. Voitsitskii from Brazil wrote: “Once again in this year a dear guest and a missionary – *Evangel'skoe slovo* – visited my home.”<sup>47</sup> N.D. Novatskii from France and A. Raslanas from Germany similarly expressed gratitude

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<sup>46</sup> Legal data pertaining to the World Fellowship are available online at [http://www.manta.com/coms2/dnbcompany\\_98ny1](http://www.manta.com/coms2/dnbcompany_98ny1) (URL accurate as of July 28 2009).

<sup>47</sup> *Evangel'skoe slovo*, 82 (1962): 30.

for “being able to read about Lord’s work in *Evangel’skoe slovo*.”<sup>48</sup> The magazine often published materials about pastoral trips and visits involving guests from abroad.

Obviously, contacts between believers in the USA and Canada were the most frequent ones, but trips of Ivan Guk from Canada to the USSR and Poland,<sup>49</sup> and of a preacher from Poland A. Baenskii to the USA,<sup>50</sup> among others, were also reported. The World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians acted in accordance with its title, striving to unite and co-ordinate Slavic Evangelicals worldwide.

In the 1970s John (Ivan) Sergey (1917-2008) became its President, in which position he remained until his death in December, 2008.<sup>51</sup> The present leadership and activities of the Fellowship are unknown, and there is a reason to believe that the organization is virtually dormant.

### **Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada**

The first Russian religious immigrants to Canada were the Doukhobors who often entered into close contact with Slavic Evangelical Christians. In 1898 Prokhanov, at that time residing in London, was asked to go to Cyprus in order to provide assistance to the Doukhobors. In the 1890s a large group of the radical Doukhobors, participants of a revival caused by the Tolstoyan ideas of Christian anarchism, pacifism, and vegetarianism, was subject to governmental repression in the Caucasus where they had lived. Leo Tolstoy and his circle aided by British Quakers, proposed emigration from Russia as a means to solve their clash with the Tsarist government. Canada agreed to

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<sup>48</sup> *Evangel’skoe slovo*, 84 (1963): 29.

<sup>49</sup> *Evangel’skoe slovo*, 82 (1962): 27.

<sup>50</sup> *Evangel’skoe slovo*, 88 (1964): 29.

<sup>51</sup> Death Notice: Rev. John M. Sergey, *Chicago Tribune*, January 04, 2009.

accept that group of refugees for subsequent resettlement in the Prairie Provinces since it badly needed agricultural settlers at that time. But the first group of the Doukhobor emigrants had decided to leave Russia before Canada agreed to admit them in late 1898. They left in the summer of 1898 for the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, governed at that time by the British.<sup>52</sup> According to Prokhanov, the Doukhobors were en route to Canada, but had to disembark on Cyprus because an epidemic broke out among them.<sup>53</sup> Prokhanov was asked to go to Cyprus by one of the members of the Committee formed to rescue the Doukhobors, a British Quaker named Brooks. According to Prokhanov himself, “my duties were to look after the general condition of the Doukhobors, to secure improvements, and to help them with their medicine.” In addition, Prokhanov taught the younger Doukhobors the English language. Prokhanov spoke about the Doukhobors and their cause with much sympathy. His work was of a purely humanitarian nature, and, as Prokhanov wrote, “By doing this work I attained some intimate relations with them.”<sup>54</sup> Later, when Prokhanov met Doukhobors on his trips to Slavic Evangelical churches in Canada, he received thanks from those who had remembered him from their time on Cyprus. Prokhanov wrote a lengthy article on the Doukhobors and his time on Cyprus for *Evangel'skaia vera*. There he confessed: “Even the Christians who do not agree with Doukhobors highly respect basic doctrines of their teaching about stopping all wars and usefulness of the communal lifestyle. I acquired my respect for Doukhobors from my personal relationship with them. Moreover, I feel part of one family with them.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Pictorial History of the Doukhobors* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1969), 57.

<sup>53</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 107.

<sup>54</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 111.

<sup>55</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 8-9 (1934): 27.

So it happened that Doukhobors and Evangelical Christians in Canada often were neighbours.<sup>56</sup> The Doukhobor village in Saskatchewan, called Vozvyshenie, was founded by a group of so called Independent Doukhobors who forsook the communal lifestyle, and filed individual homestead entries under the Homestead Act. The village came into existence in 1902, and already in 1904 it became a temporary home for a group of Russian and Ukrainian Evangelical believers from near Kiev who came to Canada in search of religious freedom. Remarkably, the newcomers, just like the Doukhobors, called themselves “spiritual Christians”!<sup>57</sup>

This was probably the first contact of the Doukhobors with Slavic Gospel Christians in Canada. *Khristianin*, which served as the official magazine of the All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union until 1928, contained an account of one of Prokhanov’s visits to Canada that took place in July of 1926, that is, a few years prior to the arrival of Slavic Gospel Christians in Benito.<sup>58</sup> The outline of his itinerary in Canada (Purdue and Blain Lake, Saskatchewan, and Brilliant, British Columbia) reveals that Prokhanov did not visit any of the numerous Ukrainian Baptist churches, and limited his trip mainly to Doukhobor settlements. The article in *Khristianin* devoted a section to an introduction of the Doukhobors and their life in Canada to the Russian reader. Notably, the article did not contain a word of criticism of the Doukhobor doctrine and practice. At the same time, Prokhanov preached to the Doukhobors and held numerous meetings with them. The article said that Doukhobors had remained “orphans” after the death of their leader Petr Verigin in 1923. Such an energetic attempt on behalf of Prokhanov to extend

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<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Kalmakoff, “The Hvas Doukhobor Settlement,” *Saskatchewan History* Volume 59, Number 2 (Winter 2007). Available online at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Hvas.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> Kindrat, *Ukrainian Baptist Movement*, 74.

<sup>58</sup> *Khristianin*, 7 (1927): 38-44.

his care to the Doukhobors pointed to his hopes to convert them to Evangelical Christianity.

The Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical church of Benito likewise emerged in the close proximity to a major cluster of the Doukhobor population in the town of Kamsack, Saskatchewan.<sup>59</sup> The large town of Kamsack, served as a trading and cultural centre for the surrounding villages, hamlets, and farms, including Benito. Shenderovskii's account of Prokhanov's visit to the Canadian Prairies in 1934 suggests that the leader of the Slavic Evangelical Christians came to visit members of his Union and also the Doukhobors: "In 1934 I.S. Prokhanov... visited communities of the Evangelical Christians in Western Canada and the communities of the Doukhobors with whom he was on the island of Cyprus in 1899 during their migration to Canada and the epidemics, helping them and caring for them. They respected him very much, and gladly received him in Canada."<sup>60</sup> The relationship between the Doukhobors and Evangelical Christians in the area was exceptionally friendly, and it was marked with mutual respect, aid, and intermixing through conversion and marriage. Another case of the same sort is the story of the Slavic Evangelical church in the town of Castlegar, British Columbia, the stronghold of the Canadian Doukhobors.

As compared to the Baptist branch, the Slavic Evangelical movement displayed a much higher degree of closeness with the old Russian dissenting sects of the Spiritual Christians, such as the Molokans and the Doukhobors. Theologically, Evangelical

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<sup>59</sup> The initial Doukhobor bloc settlement near Kamsack was once the Doukhobor North Reserve. See Carl J. Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), 128-134. The town of Veregin, the former residence of the Doukhobor leader Petr Vasil'evich Verigin and the present site of a Doukhobor Heritage Village, is just a few kilometres north of Kamsack.

<sup>60</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 325.

Christians had a strong “spiritualist” tendency and a less structured pattern of a church management and organization. No rituals were deemed necessary and even such crucial rituals as baptism or laying on of hands were often interpreted in a spiritualist manner.<sup>61</sup> Historically, Evangelical Christians found a mutually enriching *modus vivendi* with the communities of Spiritual Christians. Obvious differences were acknowledged, but they were not a hindrance for co-operation and communication based upon respect and awareness of common spiritual roots.

The Evangelical pioneers in Canada and the USA (Pashkovites and Ukrainian Stundists) arrived in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Often Evangelical believers scattered across vast territories of Canada, could not satisfactorily organize regular church life and, therefore, had to join other similar religious communities (mostly English Baptist, later Ukrainian Baptist) in order to find a church home.<sup>62</sup> Prokhanov’s Union was not there to help them and their relatively small numbers and economic weakness did not allow for a viable community structure. At that, the homestead structure did not particularly favour close-knit communities as the newcomers had to live quite far from each other. The attempts of some religiously motivated settlers to introduce an alternative

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<sup>61</sup> Compare, for instance, the treatment of the ordinance of baptism in the *Articles of faith of the Russian Baptists* (Rostov-na-Donu: Tipografia F.P. Pavlova, 1906) and those of the Prokhanovite Union (Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 480). The former understands baptism as an external ordinance of great importance: “We believe that... established by Jesus Christ holy baptism should be continued by the believers till the Second Coming. The baptism is performed by a designated minister of the Lord, and consists of a momentary immersion... of a baptisant into the water.” The latter contains the following description where water baptism is subordinate to that of the Spirit: “The Word of God teaches us of two types of baptism: 1) spiritual [baptism], and 2) water [baptism]... The water baptism is an external sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit that had taken place earlier in one’s soul.” By the way of a further comparison, a Molokan theological treatise (S.K. Zhabin, *Toward the Spiritual World*, translated and published by Daniel H. Shubin, 1994), says: “We, spiritual Christians, recognize two baptisms: one is the bodily - John’s baptism. The other is the spiritual of which John himself said, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’ The first baptism -John the Baptist’s - was adapted from the Old Covenant: it has significance only for the adherents of the Old Covenant: the letter and superficial ceremonies. The true worshippers of the New Covenant church of Christ must worship God spiritually.”

<sup>62</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 319.

pattern of resettlement often resulted in a conflict with Canadian authorities.<sup>63</sup> Such was the situation with the Hutterites and the Doukhobors for whom communal living was part of their faith.

Individuals, families and, possibly, small groups of Slavic Evangelical Christians existed in Western Canada alongside the bigger and stronger Baptist movement. Evangelical Christians were devoid of direct and substantial help from English and German Protestants, and disorganized internally. The Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada became vital only when large masses of people from the former Russian part of Poland (now western Belorussia, eastern Poland, and parts of Ukraine) started to immigrate to Canada. There were Evangelical Christians, members of Prokhanov's Union, among them. It is important to analyze what made this type of immigrants distinct from Ruthenians and Galicians. Firstly, early Evangelical Christians in Canada, although predominantly Ukrainians and Belorussians ethnically, and citizens of Poland at the time of arrival, came from the areas that used to be part of the former Russian Empire prior to its collapse and the independence of Poland. Galicians and Ruthenians came from provinces that were part of Austro-Hungary, later Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, and never belonged to the Russian Empire.<sup>64</sup> This meant that the Evangelical Christians had a much stronger affinity with Russia, its culture, and its people. Their spiritual heritage took shape alongside, and according to the similar pattern with that of Russia. Many of them converted in the old country and belonged to the communities of Prokhanov's

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<sup>63</sup> William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty. The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 14.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Skinner examined the confessional roots of the division between Uniate (Ukrainian Catholic) and Orthodox Ukrainians and pointed to "religious conflict as a key causal factor" of a tension between the groups, at times amounting to violence. See "Borderlands of Faith: Reconsidering the Origins of a Ukrainian Tragedy," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 89.

Union. Western parts of the former Russian empire, which later became part of the independent Polish state, were home to thousands of Evangelical believers. According to the history of Evangelical Christianity in Volhynia from the AUCECB archives (now Rovno, Volyn' and Zhitomir provinces of Ukraine), the Evangelical movement in the region dates back to 1867. The first converts represented a mix of ethnicities and religious backgrounds, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutherans, Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, and Germans.<sup>65</sup> Many of the members of the Benito church were born or had family roots in Volhynia. When the Evangelical Union took shape under the leadership of Prokhanov, many of the Volhynia communities became part of the Union. For example, the community of Evangelical Christians in the city of Kovel' was officially registered in 1908 under the name of The Society of Evangelists (*Obshchestvo Evangelistov*). According to the Ministry of Interior report as of 1908, evaluating loyalty of the group, members of the Society used religious literature printed and brought from Saint-Petersburg, and "the essence of their faith is to know the true God and serve him without any church ritual."<sup>66</sup> Last names of the members reveal the same complex ethnic composition, characterised by the prevailing Ukrainian component with a high percentage of Poles and Russians.

Between the two world wars the number of Evangelical Christians in eastern Poland was increasing due to the activity of the Polish Union of Evangelical Christians, the branch of the Prokhanovite church in Poland. Many of them joined masses of their compatriots, mostly of Ukrainian and Belorussian ethnicity, in their journey to Canada.

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<sup>65</sup> VSEKhB Archives, Folder 51. "Nachalo evangel'skogo dvizheniia na Volyni" (The Beginning of the Evangelical Movement in Volhynia), told by Nikita Erofeevich Bondar', written down by Elisei Mark'ianovich Rudenko, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 1968 in Zhitomir.

<sup>66</sup> F. 1335. Op. 1. D. 867, TsGIAUK (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine), Kiev.

Soon Evangelical Christians in Canada faced the necessity to co-ordinate their efforts to maintain their faith and preach to others. The initiator of this work was Ignatii Stepanovich Sidorchuk, (b. 1883 near Pinsk, Belorussia) who first came to Canada in 1912 as a citizen of Russia, then returned home in 1914, and re-immigrated to Canada in 1927 when Pinsk was already part of Poland.<sup>67</sup> Due to the efforts of Sidorchuk and other Evangelical activists the first conference of Evangelical Christians took place in Toronto from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of September, 1930. Fifteen delegates represented Western Canada, Montréal, Hamilton, Toronto and Brantford. Two special guests that participated in the Conference were John Johnson-Kondrat'ev, an early Russian Evangelical (Pashkovite) immigrant to the USA who was associated for a time with the Disciples of Christ, and Oswald Smith, a famous Canadian pastor and evangelist.<sup>68</sup> Ivan Prokhanov also sent his greetings. The delegates agreed to establish the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada as a branch of the worldwide community of Slavic Evangelical churches. Much to the benefit of this undertaking, Ivan Prokhanov spent most of the period from 1930 to 1934 in North America, organizing communities, and conducting fund-raising campaigns. Prokhanov took the responsibility of legal registration of the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada as a charitable organization. In 1933 Prokhanov visited communities of Slavic Evangelicals in Lizard Lake, Saskatchewan, Glendon, Alberta, and Benito, Manitoba, and participated in so called spiritual and edifying conferences (*dukhovno-nazidatel'nyi s'ezd*) in these localities.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 325, 329.

<sup>68</sup> On Oswald Smith please see <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/smith01.htm> (The URL is accurate as of 20 July 2009, and includes links to audio files with samples of Smith's preaching).

<sup>69</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 325-326; *Church in the Valley*, 15.

Conferences were held by the Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians annually. The first chairman of the union was Ignatii Sidorchuk (1930-40) with a break in 1934-35 when Ivan Prokhanov was formally the chairman of the Canadian Union. The peak of the activities and the numerical strength of the Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians dates back to 1945-1955. The following decades were a story of a gradual decline of the Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada. As of the early 1960s there were seventeen Slavic Evangelical churches in Canada. However, as of 1980 the Union had only twelve functioning communities across Canada. Three of them were located in Ontario (Toronto, Brantford, and London), three in Alberta (Edmonton, Bonnyville, and Glendon), three in Saskatchewan (Biggar, Saint Walburg, and Kuroki), two in British Columbia (Castlegar and Kelowna), and one in Manitoba (Benito).<sup>70</sup> Currently the organization is practically dormant. The Canadian Revenue Agency's charity listings still show the Union of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada as a registered charity, but its activities appear to be minimal. The following chapters will be devoted to the last of the mentioned Canadian churches, the Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians in Benito.

### **Role and Significance of Ivan Prokhanov for the Slavic Evangelical Movement**

Undoubtedly, Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov possessed a charismatic personality. His influence over his followers and even many people outside of the Evangelical Christians' fold was strong and lasting. There is no reason to doubt that during his lifetime Prokhanov's authority in the Union of Evangelical Christians was indisputable. However, the question may be raised to what extent the movement of the Evangelical

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<sup>70</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 330-331.

Christians was Prokhanov's personal project and whether the existence of the Slavic Evangelical Christian movement was dependent upon its leader for its separate existence.

Of course, the role of Ivan Prokhanov in the emergence of the diaspora church of Slavic Evangelical Christians was very important. Yet, no personal efforts of one man, no matter how capable and energetic, could possibly mould into one union ethnically diverse communities from all over the world without their express will. Prokhanov's pastoral travels were limited to Europe and North America; he had never been to South America, Australia, or China that were home to many Slavic Evangelical Christians. Sometimes accidental copies of *Evangel'skaia vera* prompted isolated groups of Slavic Evangelical Christians to contact the wider Union and, eventually, join it. One report read:

"Increasingly more brothers and sisters we encounter in diverse parts of the world through *Evangel'skaia vera*. This way, for example, we got into contact with Evangelical Russian brethren, stranded in far-away Paraguay in South America."<sup>71</sup> Another report a few months later devoted a large section to the Paraguayan communities, which had dozens of members (48 in one church and 35 in another) and even extended missionary outreach to Paraguayan indigenous tribes.<sup>72</sup> Even though Prokhanov's personal energy was instrumental in the creation of the diaspora church, it was the grass-roots initiative and the desire to re-establish a link with fellow believers worldwide that made it happen.

It would be a mistake to think that Evangelical Christians dwelt upon the personality of Prokhanov, or exceedingly depended upon his ideological or literary legacy after his death. The movement of the Evangelical Christians continued its existence for many years after Prokhanov's death, from 1935 until well into the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 7 (1932): 11.

<sup>72</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932): 16-17.

century. Moreover, the peak of membership and activities of the Slavic Evangelical Christian brotherhood in the diaspora fell on the years after Prokhanov's death, the 1940s and 1950s. The World Fellowship of Evangelical Christians with headquarters in Chicago served as a worldwide centre of the Evangelical Christians. This centre published periodicals, co-ordinated the activities of national unions and isolated groups, and organized Union-wide events such as conferences and training courses for ministers. There was no charismatic figure comparable in influence with Ivan Prokhanov in the movement, and the affairs of the brotherhood were managed collegially.

It is useful to look at the official publication of the World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians in the 1960s and 70s, *Evangel'skoe slovo*, to determine to what extent the figure of Prokhanov maintained its once monumental significance for later generations of believers. It will be particularly useful to contrast that magazine with *Khristianin* of 1926-27. These years were chosen, because it was the time when Prokhanov was still a full of life unquestionable head of the largest and thriving Protestant church in the USSR, while religion still enjoyed a fair degree of freedom in the country.

The theme of the personal role of Ivan Prokhanov is present in the issues of *Khristianin* of the period. According to a letter written by Egorov, a Russian Evangelical Christian resident in Canada on occasion of Prokhanov's visit to North America in 1925, it "caused an indescribable joy. Some people here call him [Prokhanov] a new apostle Paul."<sup>73</sup> A group of believers from near Kharkov wrote that they "strive to accomplish what dear brother Prokhanov wrote about [in *Khristianin*]."<sup>74</sup> Virtually each issue of

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<sup>73</sup> *Khristianin*, 5 (1927): 42.

<sup>74</sup> *Khristianin*, 5 (1927): 62.

*Khristianin* began with an opening poem, or, sometimes, a song by Ivan Prokhanov.<sup>75</sup> Practically all issues contained pieces penned by Prokhanov, such as poems and sermons, along with reports about Prokhanov's pastoral trips. In the Issue 1 as of 1927 three first pieces in a row were authored by Prokhanov, a New Year address to readers, a poem, and a sermon. A reader of *Khristianin* with no prior knowledge of the situation within the Union of Evangelical Christians would very soon realize that the figure of Prokhanov far surpassed in importance anyone else in the Union. Characteristically, articles by Iakov Zhidkov were virtually absent from *Khristianin* (no articles by Zhidkov in the entire year of 1927, for example), although Zhidkov was co-editor of the magazine along with Prokhanov, and became chairman of the AUCECB in 1944.

*Evangel'skoe slovo* as of 1960s, that is, at least a generation after Prokhanov's death, is to a high degree similar to *Khristianin* in some respects. The long-standing tradition of staunch non-denominationalism remained. Evangelical Christians of 1960s perceived themselves as a part of a larger historical process endowed with a special mission. *Evangel'skoe slovo* saw its particular mission in co-ordinating the efforts of national unions and churches and providing pastoral care to groups, and individual Slavic Evangelical Christians all over the world.

An analysis of the issues of *Evangel'skoe slovo* in possession of this author (1962-1966) reveals that the personality or memory of Prokhanov did not play a significant role in the publications of the magazine. Direct references to Prokhanov were very rare and incidental in nature. On one occasion Prokhanov was mentioned as one of a number of "great reformers of Christianity" along with John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Martin Luther,

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<sup>75</sup> E.g. *Khristianin*, 11 (1926): 3-6.

Calvin, Moody, Spurgeon, Kargel' and Pavlov.<sup>76</sup> Remarkably, Vasilii Pavlov (1856-1924) also referred to as a “great reformer” was the chairman of the Union of Russian Baptists from 1909, that is, at the time when personal tensions between Prokhanov and leaders of the Russian Baptists Union were at their peak. On another occasion the magazine gave credit to Prokhanov for establishing the tradition of the annual “prayer week” among Evangelical Christians.<sup>77</sup> *Evangel'skoe slovo* offered for sale Christian hymnbooks (*Gusli, Timpany, Kimvvaly*, and others), which contained hymns composed, translated, or edited by Ivan Prokhanov, without an indication of authorship. The administration of the World Fellowship was collegial, and although 6-8 names of Slavic Evangelical leaders from important communities (Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto, and Buenos Aires) were mentioned frequently, the Fellowship clearly did not have a single leader.

In spite of the importance of the charismatic leadership of Prokhanov during a certain period of time, the movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians after his death was a vital and sustainable organization for a long period of time. Further, the movement at a later period was not dependent upon the person of Prokhanov for the legitimization of its existence or activities. The World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians maintained main principles of the Prokhanovite movement, such as emphasized non-denominationalism, a sense of being a part of the world evangelicalism, a focus upon a particular mission to Slavic peoples, and a global vision. At the same time, the importance of Prokhanov as a person, so prominent initially, faded when he was no longer the leader of the community.

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<sup>76</sup> *Evangel'skoe slovo*, 92 (1966): 10.

<sup>77</sup> *Evangel'skoe slovo*, 87 (1964): 28.

## Conclusion

The history of the communities of Evangelical Christians scattered across Canada and other lands is best interpreted in the context of transnational developments which simultaneously involved more than one physical, cultural, and political point of reference. Slavic Evangelicals in the diaspora by nature were a transnational community. Thus, to satisfactorily explain what was happening in a specific rural locality in Manitoba, one would need to consider events, people, and developments taking place thousands of miles away in wholly different social, political, and cultural setting. Loewen and Friesen argued that “transnational ties could provide financial resources, social networks, and spiritual and mythological truths.”<sup>78</sup> They could also, at least to a degree, affect the vitality of an immigrant community. The next chapters are a tale of how this intertwinement of local, national, and transnational contexts was reflected in the life of one church in the Canadian hinterlands from late 1920s until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>78</sup> Loewen and Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities*, 173.

## **Chapter IV. The Beginnings: 1928-1945**

This chapter is devoted to the first period in the life of the Russian-Ukrainian church of Evangelical Christians in Benito, that is, from late 1920s to the end of World War II. This was the period when a small group of newcomers with very limited resources, but great enthusiasm, formed a congregation and expanded. In spite of the hardships and challenges, they were able to survive, establish themselves, and emerge as a cohesive ethno-religious community.

It will be necessary to provide some relevant geographical and historical background information related to the village of Benito, the area that surrounds the village, and the history of its settlement. The Slavic immigration into the area is especially important for this story. Then we will deal with the organizing of the community, the motivations and goals of the newcomers who had formed the church, their ethnic and linguistic background, and their economic circumstances. This chapter will offer an explanation as to why the church from early on formally identified itself a Russian-Ukrainian one, although Russians were only a small minority compared to Ukrainians both in the Province of Manitoba and within the Benito church community. The chapter will also analyze why the community chose to become a part of numerically weak Prokhanov's Union of Evangelical Christians in spite of the fact that Manitoba and Saskatchewan were home to numerous Ukrainian Baptist churches.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Woodsworth's writings provide factual material on the Canadian attitudes towards non-British immigration to Western Canada, and on early Protestant proselytizing efforts among them. Vivian Olender's research was particularly instrumental in reconstructing one such effort, the Presbyterian mission among Canadian Ukrainians in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike Galician Ukrainian immigration to Canada that due to its numbers and economical contribution to the development of the Canadian West has attracted considerable scholarly attention, Ukrainian Evangelical immigration from Russia is largely neglected. Recent research on early 20<sup>th</sup> century Evangelical religious refugees from Russia in the Prairies

This chapter will show how the place of origin in the old country and personal religious background played a role in the self-identification of the Benito community as a Russian-Ukrainian church of Evangelical Christians. Furthermore, the community's long-standing role as a sectarian and discriminated against group shifted to a realization of a new role of a voluntary association in an individualistic and capitalist society where religion is a private matter. The initial stage in the history of the Benito church can be called, after Frank Epp's definition of the Mennonites of the same time period, "a people's struggle for survival."<sup>2</sup> Yet, the Benito church positioned itself as part of the larger world of the Canadian evangelical Christianity from early on, participating in such activities, typical of Anglo-Canadian evangelical churches of the time, as home mission, outreach ministry, and social ministry. Thus, the Benito community was one of those immigrant evangelical churches, which, as noted by Bruce Guenther, "represent an important strand within the larger Canadian evangelical Protestant tapestry."<sup>3</sup>

A detailed analysis of Slavic Evangelical Christians in relation to evangelicalism and a comparison between them and other religious settlers in western Canada will follow in Chapter VII. Nevertheless, elements of comparison will be used in the present chapter as necessary.

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conducted by Jonathan Kalmakoff, a Doukhobor activist, genealogist, and historian, proved to be of special value for this study. A history of Ukrainian Baptists in Canada by Rev. Petro Kindrat remains the most complete such study to date. Its merits, such as factual wealth, specificity, and first-hand knowledge of the subject are somewhat hindered by an overt nationalist and political bias. Kindrat strove to present the Evangelical movement among Ukrainians, both in the Ukraine and in Canada, as something completely independent from the analogous developments in Russia or among other Eastern Slavic immigrants in Canada, a view that cannot be justified by facts.

<sup>2</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940. A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto, Ont., Macmillan of Canada, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Bruce L. Guenther, "Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada" in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 370.

## Early Slavic Immigration to Canada

Writings by James Woodsworth (1874-1942), a Canadian Methodist minister, social activist and politician, founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Foundation, a predecessor of the NDP, reflected the attitudes of the Canadian state to immigration in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Woodsworth's *Strangers Within Our Gates*<sup>5</sup> treated the problem of immigration that Canada was increasingly facing, and proposed how the state and the society should approach it. From the vantage point of today's Canadian multiculturalism and tolerance, the epithets that Woodsworth used to describe many groups of immigrants sound truly appalling.<sup>6</sup> However, Woodsworth always made sure to emphasize immigrants' worthy qualities or the contribution they have made to Canadian society. Classification and description of Ukrainian and Russian immigrants that reflected prevailing views of the time is of particular interest for this study.

Woodsworth was absolutely right in saying that "most of our immigrants from Russia are not Russians. Many of them are Germans or Jews; others are Lithuanians and Poles."<sup>7</sup> The Russian Doukhobors, whom Woodsworth praised for being hard working, industrious and clean people, despite their peculiar lifestyle and "weird" religion, were one notable exception.<sup>8</sup> Ukrainians from the Russian Empire, or "Little Russians," as he called them, apparently, were so scarce at that time in Canada compared to main immigrant groups, that Woodsworth did not even devote a section in his book to them.

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<sup>4</sup> See Kenneth McNaught, *The Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) on Woodsworth's life and activities.

<sup>5</sup> James S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates: Coming Canadians* (Toronto: The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1909).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, the Slovaks are described as essentially the same as the Czech (Bohemians), but "of a lower grade," Armenians are deemed "incapable... of hard labour" and "parasites", while Syrians are accused of a low intellectual level.

<sup>7</sup> Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, 115, 123.

Most Ukrainians coming to Canada at that time, according to Woodsworth's classification, were Galicians and Ruthenians, that is, Ukrainians from the then Austro-Hungary. The public opinion of those settlers at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was rather unfavourable. Woodsworth mentioned that "the word Galician is almost a term of reproach," especially due to violent crime among them and the general lack of culture.<sup>9</sup> In spite of that, their "desirability" for Canada, according to Woodsworth, should be measured by the contribution they have made to the society. The latter was very valuable, for "much of the rough work of nation-building in Western Canada is done by a despised Galician."<sup>10</sup>

Especially notable in Woodsworth's account of the Galicians and Ruthenians is his belief that the religious shift of those immigrants from the Uniate, or Ukrainian Catholic faith with its allegiance to the Roman Pope toward a more "evangelical" type of Christianity would be highly beneficial for their acculturation in Canada. Woodsworth specifically laid his hopes on an interesting religious development among Canadian Ukrainians in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century known as the Independent Greek church.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the movement was an attempt to create a Ukrainian Protestant church strongly supported by Anglo-Canadian Presbyterians.<sup>12</sup> The latter provided the Independent Greek church with some financial assistance and also offered theological and pastoral training for prospective Independent Greek ministers at Manitoba College.<sup>13</sup> The Presbyterians saw

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<sup>9</sup> Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, 134.

<sup>10</sup> Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, 135.

<sup>11</sup> Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, 138.

<sup>12</sup> See Stella Hryniuk and Roman Yereniuk, "Building the New Jerusalem on the Prairies: The Ukrainian Experience" in *Visions of the New Jerusalem. Religious Settlement on the Prairies*, ed. Benjamin G. Smillie, ed. (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), 146.

<sup>13</sup> See Vivian Olender, "Symbolic Manipulation in the Proselytizing of Ukrainians: An Attempt to Create a Protestant Uniate Church" in *The Ukrainian Religious Experience: Tradition and the Canadian Cultural Context*, David Goa, ed. (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1989), 191-207.

their work among the Galicians as a means to ensure Anglo-Canadian domination in the Canadian West and as the way to “civilize” the newcomers who did not meet the Anglo-Canadian standard of civility of the time.<sup>14</sup> That short-lived church emerged in 1903, but largely ceased to exist by the early 1920s.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, another Protestant body, the Baptists, had a limited degree of success proselytizing among Galician Ukrainians in Canada.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, due to a sparse population, and an unusually high, even by Canadian standards, percentage of immigrants, in the Prairies “the forces of English-Canadian assimilation were relatively weak.”<sup>17</sup>

William Janzen in his study of the relationship between the Canadian state and communalist religious settlers identified four main areas of tension. They are landholding, public school system, religious pacifism, and acceptance by religious communalists of the state assistance.<sup>18</sup> At times the tension amounted in an open conflict, resulting in a ban (1919) on the admission into Canada of Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors because of the “peculiar habits, modes of life and methods of holding property” of the three groups, or<sup>19</sup> Sons’ of Freedom protests, which at times included nude parading, and destruction of private and government property and vanished only by the early 1960s. It would be safe to say that the Benito community (and Slavic Evangelical Christians in general) had no record of conflict or tension in any of the mentioned areas. Nevertheless,

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<sup>14</sup> Olender, “Symbolic Manipulation in the Proselytizing of Ukrainians,” 192.

<sup>15</sup> Olender, “Symbolic Manipulation in the Proselytizing of Ukrainians,” 200.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Edwin Harris, *The Baptist Union of Western Canada. A Centennial History 1873-1973* (St John, N.B.: Lingley Printing Co., 1976), 185-190.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Wright, “The Canadian Protestant Tradition 1914-1945” in *The Canadian Protestant Experience 1760-1990* (Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1990), 162.

<sup>18</sup> Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 1-4.

<sup>19</sup> Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 15. In 1922 it was reversed in relation to the Mennonites and Hutterites, while the restrictions against Doukhobors were lifted in 1926.

the comparative look at the respective patterns of behaviour of Slavic Evangelicals and other religious settlers will situate the Benito case better within the context.

### **Benito: Local Background**

The village of Benito is a rural settlement located in the Municipality of Swan River, only 2 kilometres east of the Saskatchewan border, 37 kilometres southwest of Swan River, and about 475 kilometres northwest of the provincial capital, Winnipeg. The settlement was founded in 1905 and settled by pioneers from England and eastern Canada, and Russia. In 1941 the settlement was formally incorporated as the village of Benito. Currently the village has about 415 residents,<sup>20</sup> about one-third of them of Slavic ancestry.

The most recent census records for the Rural Municipality of Swan River of which Benito is a part, showed that as of 2006 the Ukrainian ethnic group occupied the second place after the English among ethnic groups represented in the Municipality, while Ukrainian was as of that year the most wide-spread mother tongue other than English. The population born outside Canada, however, amounted only to 3% of the total, as compared to the Manitoba provincial average of 13%. Of all immigrants residing in the Municipality in 2006 43% immigrated before 1961, versus 16% in the province of Manitoba. These data mean that the Swan River area has long ceased to serve a preferred destination for immigrants (particularly, Ukrainians), which it was before the 1960s. The census records also indicated the overall gradual demographic decline of the area in the past forty or forty-five years. For instance, almost one half of all dwellings in the Municipality were built in the period before 1961 (versus around 33% of dwellings that

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<sup>20</sup> <http://community.svcn.mb.ca/benito/> (URL valid as of 15 January 2010)

old in the province), while almost 50% of the population as of 2006 belonged to the age group of 45 years and older, also much older than the Manitoba average.<sup>21</sup>

There are two functioning churches in the village, The Living Word Assembly and the Benito United church. Formerly the village had many more church communities and buildings, among them a Ukrainian Catholic church, a Roman Catholic church, a Doukhobor prayer home, and a Seventh-Day Adventist church.<sup>22</sup> Another church that stood in the village from 1941 until 1996, the Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical Christian church, and the community that attended it is the topic of this research.

The first Slavic settlers in the Benito area were Russian Doukhobors who resettled in Saskatchewan and parts of present-day Manitoba following their immigration from Russia in 1898-99. The territory of the present village of Benito in 1899-1905 was within the so called North Reserve of the homestead land allotted by the government of Clifford Sifton for Russian Doukhobors.<sup>23</sup> After most Community Doukhobors abandoned the area following the unresolved argument with the Canadian government over the issues of communal land holding, public school attendance, and disclosing vital statistics, the territory became open for other settlers. However, some Doukhobors, who split off the Petr Verigin's community and agreed to comply with the law, remained in the area and retained their homesteads.<sup>24</sup> One of the main present centres of Saskatchewan Doukhobors, the town of Kamsack, is located within a one hour drive from Benito on the Saskatchewan side of the provincial border. Although the migration of the people who

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<sup>21</sup> See 2006 Census Profile, Swan River, RM produced by the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics and available at [http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset\\_library/en/statistics/demographics/communities/swan\\_river\\_rm.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/statistics/demographics/communities/swan_river_rm.pdf) (URL valid as of 30 July, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 16, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> On the North Reserve of the period see Carl J. Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), 128-134.

<sup>24</sup> Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 176-77.

would later form a nucleus of the Benito congregation occurred much later, in late 1920s, there is a record of some Slavic Evangelical immigration and presence in the area dating back to the very beginning of the 1900s.

There were a few early sectarian non-Doukhobor Slavic groups in close proximity to Benito. One such group was so called *Pavlovtsy*, called so by the name of the village of Pavlovki near Kharkov, Ukraine, which was their stronghold.<sup>25</sup> *Pavlovtsy* came into existence in 1870s and professed a mixture of the Stundist and Tolstoyan views. Their understanding of Christianity was characterised by non-ritualism, equality, freedom of religious expression, and pacifism. Notably, they were “at odds with the emergent Baptist Church, with its emphasis on dogma and organization.”<sup>26</sup> Ethnically most of them were Ukrainians. They spoke a dialect of the Ukrainian language, especially close to Russian, but also were proficient in the standard literary Russian language. From 1899 to 1914 a group of about 40 followers of the *Pavlovtsy* movement immigrated to Canada from the Russian Empire. Many of them resettled in and near Kamsack among the somewhat like-minded Doukhobors, who helped the *Pavlovtsy* to get established. Later some of the *Pavlovtsy* left the Kamsack area for other parts of Canada, the USA, or re-immigrated to the USSR. The remaining members of the small sectarian group joined the Independent Doukhobors of Kamsack. Interestingly, some of them modified their Ukrainian last names to sound more Doukhobor. For instance, Teterenko became Tetoff, Eremenko took the name of Eremenkoff, and Sereda became Sardoff.<sup>27</sup> Intermarriage between the Doukhobors and the *Pavlovtsy* occurred from early on. It is remarkable that the first

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<sup>25</sup> Graham P. Camfield, “The Pavlovtsy of Khar’kov Province, 1886-1905: Harmless Sectarians or Dangerous Rebels?” in *Slavonic and East European Review*, 68 (4): 692-717.

<sup>26</sup> Camfield, “The Pavlovtsy,” 693.

<sup>27</sup> The story of the *Pavlovtsy* in Canada was researched and told by Jonathan Kalmakoff, the creator of the Doukhobor Genealogy Website. It is available online at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Pavlovtsy.htm>.

legally recognized marriage in Canada involving a Doukhobor was a wedding of a Doukhobor Nikolai Antifaeff and a *Pavlovtsy* member Anna Ol'khovik, performed in Swan River, Manitoba by a Methodist minister Rev. John E. Lane in April, 1906.<sup>28</sup>

Another group of early Evangelical settlers relatively close to Benito, in the village of Hyas, Saskatchewan, were immigrants from near Kiev, Ukraine, who came to the area around 1904 because of religious persecution back home. They belonged to the Stundist sect known as *Maliiovantsy*, and called themselves “Spiritual Christians” just as the Doukhobors and Molokans. This branch of Stundism differed from the mainstream Baptists by ecstatic worship and “spiritual,” or allegorical, interpretation of the Scriptures. Both Doukhobors and Slavic Evangelical newcomers readily engaged in debates of a religious nature with one another. Doukhobors helped them, and eventually at least one of the members of that group also joined the Doukhobors (Pavel Skripnik who changed his last name to Skripnikoff). Yet, a group of original Evangelical settlers remained in Hyas, and, eventually, joined the activities of the Prokhanovite Union. As of June, 1933 two delegates from Hyas, brothers E. Belous and K. Kortenko participated in the “2<sup>nd</sup> Spiritual and Edifying Conference” of Evangelical Christians that took place in Benito.<sup>29</sup>

This paradigm of relationship characterises the Independent Doukhobors of Saskatchewan and Manitoba as an open, rather tolerant milieu ready to help the like-minded in spite of doctrinal and practical disagreements. Independent Doukhobors, unlike many of their communal and Sons of Freedom brethren who moved to British Columbia, generally complied with the governmental requirements regarding individual homestead taking, compulsory school education, and disclosing vital statistics. This

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<sup>28</sup> Johnathan J. Kalmakoff, *The Pavlovtsy*, quoted from <http://www.doukhobor.org/Pavlovtsy.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 11 (1933), 23.

resulted into a virtual absence of any significant conflict of the Independent Doukhobors with the authorities or the surrounding population, and a much faster and fuller integration into Canadian life.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest Evangelical settlers in Western Canada had the following last names: Saveliev, Pavlov, Fedorov, Gavrilov, Muzyko, Lemberg, Mazurenko, Dunaenko, Egorov, Shcherbinin.<sup>31</sup> Out of ten last names three (Muzyko, Mazurenko, Dunaenko) appear to be Ukrainian, six are Russian, and one, Lemberg, sounds German. This breakdown fairly accurately illustrates the ethnic composition of early Russian evangelicals in the old country and in Canada prior to the mass immigration of Ukrainian Evangelicals from the Volhynia in the 1920s.

At the same time a predominantly Ukrainian Baptist church was organized in Winnipeg in 1903 by about 25 religious refugees from the “Russian” Ukraine (especially Kiev Province) and the Caucasus. Since members of that church came from the Stundist and Caucasian Baptist background, the church in Winnipeg identified as a Baptist church from the beginning of its existence. Among its founding members who came to Winnipeg between 1900 and 1905 we encounter the following last names: Kapustyn’skyi, Muzhov, Koval’, Goncharenko, Kotenko, Belianivs’kyi, Gromeniuk, Lesyk, Movchenko, Servins’kyi, Lipovyi, Zabolotnyi, Nikiforov, Osadchyi, Shakot’ko, Kozachok, Marushchak, Bubys, Mizharovs’kyi, Grokh, Konotopenko, Tvardovs’kyi, Fesenko, Pavlov.<sup>32</sup> As we can see, only 3 last names out of 25 (Muzhov, Nikiforov, and Pavlov)

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<sup>30</sup> George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (The Carleton Library, 1977), 240-241.

<sup>31</sup> Liudvig Shenderovskii, *Evangel’skie Khristiane. Vozrozhdennoe evangel’skoe dvizhenie v istoricheskoi khristianskoi tserkvi (Evangelical Christians. The Re-born Evangelical Movement within the Historical Christian Church)* (Toronto: Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians, 1980), 318.

<sup>32</sup> Petro Kindrat, *Ukrains’kyi Baptysts’kyi Rukh u Kanadi (The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada)* (Winnipeg, Toronto: Doroha Prawdy, 1972), 40.

appear to be Russian. Very soon the First Baptist Church of Winnipeg (English-speaking) learned about the new group of Baptists, and started providing them with moral and financial support. Over the next years the Ukrainian Baptist church in Winnipeg devoted significant effort to evangelizing among numerous Ukrainian newcomers in Manitoba.

Another Ukrainian Baptist centre in western Canada was the town of Overstone in Southern Manitoba where the Ukrainian Baptist group was organized thanks to the activities of local German Baptists and their preacher Johann Burgdorff in 1901.<sup>33</sup>

Galicians and Ruthenians, Ukrainians from what is now Western Ukraine and parts of Poland and Slovakia, continued to arrive in great numbers lured by free or cheap homesteads and other opportunities, mainly of an economic nature. Very few, if any of them were Protestant prior to arrival. Most Ukrainian immigrants from Austro-Hungary were Ukrainian Catholics (also known as Uniates, or Catholics of the Eastern Rite). Orthodox believers and Roman Catholics were a minority.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of the efforts of early Baptist settlers and the considerable aid of their Anglo-Canadian and German co-religionists, in 1909 Ukrainian Baptist groups formed a Union under the name Ruthenian-Galician Union of Western Canada (*Rus'ko-Halyts'kyi Soiuz Zahidnoi Kanady*).<sup>35</sup> The name of the Union containing a reference to Ruthenians (living in what are now westernmost Transcarpathian Ukraine, Slovakia, and Poland) and Galicians, indicates a rapid shift in its membership from predominantly Central Ukrainian with some Russian component to mainly Western Ukrainian following the general pattern of the Ukrainian immigration into Canada.

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<sup>33</sup> Kindrat, *The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada*, 51-56. Harris, *The Baptist Union of Western Canada*, 185.

<sup>34</sup> Myroslaw Tataryn, "Canada's Eastern Christians," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 292.

<sup>35</sup> Kindrat, *The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada*, 46.

Western Ukraine, or Galicia, rejoined the rest of the Ukrainian lands only in 1939, when Galicia was annexed by the USSR. Ironically, Ukraine is indebted for its present national unity and territorial extension to none else than the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, who is cursed by Western Ukrainians for destroying their traditional way of life through the forced collectivization and the assault on religion. In spite of the political unity within the Ukrainian SSR till 1991 and then within the independent Ukraine, the distinction between Galicians and the rest of Ukrainians, rooted, according to some recent scholarship, mainly in the denominational difference, is persistent.<sup>36</sup>

### **Volhynia, the Old Country**

Individuals and families who were soon to become founders of the Benito church started coming into the area in late 1929. The first members were born and raised in the same historical region, Volhynia. This province and its people had a truly difficult history. The Volhynia's people lost control over their own land in medieval times, following the disintegration of the Kievan Rus, and since then the province belonged to the Kingdom of Poland, the Great Duchy of Lithuania, the Russian Empire (from 1783), again to the resurrected Polish Republic (from 1918), and the USSR (from 1939).<sup>37</sup> Currently most of the region is part of the independent Ukrainian state. At the time of the emergence of the Evangelical movements in Russia all of Volhynia was part of the Russian Empire. The birth of the evangelical awakening in the province dates back to 1876 when a local dweller Semion Ovdeichuk converted due to the preaching of a believer of Czech origin.

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<sup>36</sup> See Barbara Skinner, "Borderlands of Faith: Reconsidering the Origins of a Ukrainian Tragedy," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 88-116.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy Shields Kollmann "The principalities of Rus' in the Fourteenth Century" in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 6, Michael Jones, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 6: 770, and Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 302, 585-88.

In the following year Ivan Riaboshapka, a prominent leader of the Ukrainian Stundism, came to the area to encourage the new converts and plant a church. Due to a geographical proximity to the north-western urban centres of the Russian Empire, such as Saint-Petersburg, Riga, and Warsaw, the province soon came under the influence of the emerging Prokhanovite movement. From its first steps the Evangelical movement in Volhynia was characterised by a great ethnic diversity. The analysis of relevant archival documents pertaining to the formation and legalization of the Evangelical church in Kovel' after the October Manifesto of 1905, shows that although Ukrainians comprised the majority of Evangelical believers in the province, a high proportion of the latter were of Polish, German, Russian, and Czech origin.<sup>38</sup> These believers normally used the Russian language as the method of interethnic communication in their meetings.

In independent Poland in the interwar period, Volhynia was one of the strongholds of the Polish Evangelical church which belonged to the broader worldwide family of the Prokhanovite movement. Liudvig Shenderovskii provided statistical data on Evangelical Christians in Poland as of 1939. Out of 134 communities and large groups of the Evangelical Christians in the country 93, that is, about 70% were located in Volhynia.<sup>39</sup> The town of Zdolbunov, the birthplace of many of the early Benito settlers, had an active Evangelical Christian church, with a youth group "The Young Vineyard," which organized literary nights.<sup>40</sup> In the 1930s the Slavic Evangelical church ran an orphanage in the Volhynian city of Kovel'. This charitable undertaking was generously

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<sup>38</sup> For example, "Ob obrazovavshemsyav Kovele obshchestve Evangelistov" (About the Society of Evangelicals formed in Kovel') in F. 1335. Op. 1. D. 867, 1908, TsGIAUK (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine), Kiev.

<sup>39</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 262-263.

<sup>40</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 8 (1933), 20.

supported by many Evangelical Christian groups and individual believers in North America.<sup>41</sup>

Volhynia was a rural and economically backward part of Poland, populated mostly by the Ukrainian ethnic minority.<sup>42</sup> Ukrainians in Poland, in spite of their significant numbers (14% of population as of 1918), did not enjoy any sort of political or cultural autonomy. They were largely deprived of the opportunity to exert any political influence or develop education in the mother tongue. Inter-ethnic relations between Ukrainian and Polish communities in the interwar Poland were marked by a profound conflict. Later, during the Nazi occupation of the region, it burst open in the form of an ethnic cleansing of Poles in Volhynia known in Poland as the Volhynian Slaughter (Polish *Rzeź wołyńska*) by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army guerrillas (Ukr. *Ukrain'ska Povstan'ska Armia*).<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the ethnic discrimination in interwar Poland, the non-Polish population was subject to religious discrimination and prejudice. Although the Polish Constitution promised freedom of religion, it guaranteed the Roman Catholic church special rights and privileges. Registration of religious communities was subject to the discretion of the officials of the Ministry of Cults, who were especially reluctant to extend their benevolence to sectarian communities. The public sentiment towards sectarians in a staunchly Catholic Poland was often unfriendly or even hostile.<sup>44</sup> Hence, Ukrainians of Evangelical faith were often subject to dual discrimination, both as an ethnic and religious minority.

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<sup>41</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4-6 (1938), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Magosci, *A History of Ukraine*, 587-88.

<sup>43</sup> About the Volhynian Slaughter see, for example: Timothy Snyder, *The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943. The Past and Present Society* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 226-228.

Therefore, it is possible to point to three main overlapping reasons for emigration of Ukrainian Evangelical Christians from Poland. Firstly, they did not see much economic opportunity in their homeland due to the economic backwardness of Volhynia. Secondly, limited employment and economic opportunities were further aggravated by ethnic discrimination and the marginalised status of minorities in the political and social life of the interwar Poland. Lastly, for Ukrainian Evangelicals of Volhynia emigration to the New World was also a chance to get rid of religious discrimination, prejudice, and limitations. Canada, along with the USA and Argentina, was one of the most popular destinations for Polish Ukrainians, and a traditional destination country for Ukrainian immigrants for decades.

A few of the Benito pioneer families and individuals came from the town of Zdolbunov or surroundings, the town of Dubno and adjacent rural areas, about 40 kilometres from Zdolbunov, nowadays the Rovno (Ukr. *Rivne*) province in Western Ukraine. Other families, of Belorussian origin, came from near Monki, now a town in the Bialystok county of Poland, on the border with Belorussia.

The conversation below took place in the home of a senior couple of local Doukhobors in Benito. This was the first out of the series of interviews taken for this study. Both informants, Laura and Peter Verigin, were born around the time the first Evangelicals came into Benito and the surrounding area (the late 1920s) and are, therefore, living witnesses of the history of the Benito Evangelical Christians. Mrs. Verigin has been a Doukhobor community activist for many years, and received distinctions for her involvement with community affairs. She has had a fairly extensive experience speaking to the public. Although her husband Peter started answering

questions, Mrs. Verigin took a lead in the conversation. Both Mrs. and Mr. Verigin were about equally comfortable with using English and Russian during the conversation, and switched from one language to another constantly, sometimes within the same phrase. It was obvious that they enjoyed speaking Russian, but sometimes lacked appropriate vocabulary to convey more sophisticated ideas. In relation to the Benito church the Verigins assumed a position of external, albeit sympathetic, observers and narrators. Using Alessandro Portelli's classification of narrative modes, this interview (interrupted by a lunch), corresponds to the collective mode, with the community and the neighbourhood as social and space referents.<sup>45</sup>

Peter Verigin: The area was originally populated with the people of British origin. That would be English, Scottish, and Irish. Because they were the first people that came here.

Interviewer: The first white people.

Laura Verigin: That's right. Because there were native people, a lot, in this area.

P.V.: Consequently that meant that they had a further influence because they were the ones who had homesteaded the land; they'd taken the area and started the agriculture in the area.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you about those Evangelical people. Were they also given homesteads?

L.V.: They could've purchased, but already there was nothing to purchase. The land was taken.

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<sup>45</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "History-Telling and Time: An Example from Kentucky," *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 20, 1/2 (Apr. 1, 1992): 54.

Interviewer: So what did they do?

L.V.: They just came... like somebody had sponsored them. And they'd lived as squatters. If there was a little hut or... like, some of them... even a chicken house, they just converted it into a place to live. And they were resourceful. Very, very resourceful. Right away they get a job, no matter what you do, they can do it.

Interviewer: Handymen, journeymen?

L.V.: They chopped wood, they sold it, whatever was available, they were able to do it and bring home a little bit of cash. And, of course, the women were very thrifty, they knew what it was to sow, to knit, to grow a garden, to look after families.

Interviewer: But very few of them had their own acreage...

P.V.: Eventually, yes. ...Some of this farming land was vacated by the people of British origin because of the economic depression. They went elsewhere looking for economic opportunities.<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that Mr. and Mrs. Verigin immediately and tacitly negotiated the roles, where an question pertaining to farming was answered by Mr. Verigin, while Mrs. Verigin felt more comfortable explaining the role of women in helping Slavic Evangelical families survive.

Int.: So, ethnically they were not so much Russian as Ukrainian.

L.V.: *Malorusy* [Little Russians, an outdated term for Ukrainians], they were something like... you know...

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<sup>46</sup> Sergey Petrov. Interview with Laura and Peter Verigin, Benito, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.

P.V.: [interrupts] Belorussians.

L.V.: Well, Belorussians... The language wasn't too hard to grasp, but we were young at that time. We were still young people... The minister that put that church up that was just demolished here about four years ago, his daughter and I, we were in the same grade.

P.V.: They came about [19]28-29, the end of the 20s.

L.V.: Right into the Great Depression.<sup>47</sup>

Both informants struggled with identifying newcomers as an ethnic group. It felt like the question took the Verigins by surprise, and that they have never thought of them as representatives of a specific ethnic group. Informants' inability to define newcomers in terms of ethnicity likely reflected the fact that the newcomers did not define themselves in those terms. As we shall see further, Slavic Evangelical Christians were frequently hesitant to define their ethnicity as Ukrainian, Russian, or Belorussian. Rather, the umbrella term "Slavic" all too often was used as an ethnic (in fact, ethno-religious) designation.

The Verigins were surprisingly precise in identifying the years of the arrival of first Evangelical Christians to Benito. The most feasible explanation of this is that in their perception (and, likely, in the collective perception of the village) the arrival of the newcomers was linked to the memorable years of the Great Depression. In the words of Portelli, the Depression served as a powerful "place of memory,"<sup>48</sup> thus rescuing the chronology from oblivion. It turned out that the Verigins were aware of the historical

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<sup>47</sup> Sergey Petrov. Interview with Laura and Peter Verigin, Benito, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Portelli, "History-Telling and Time: An Example from Kentucky," 60-61.

book about the community, *The Church in the Valley*, which contained the same arrival dates of 1928-29. However, it is unlikely that they took the date from the book, since the book contained numerous references to the newcomers as Ukrainians and even sections in the Ukrainian language.

The Benito immigrants, strictly speaking, were not sponsored by anyone. Although the country had sunk into a deep depression by then, Canada still continued to accept immigrants in the late 1920s. In contrast with the migration flows of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and pre-war years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the World War I “Canadian authorities showed little interest in resuming the flow.”<sup>49</sup> In fact, the immigration of such religious groups as Mennonites, Hutterites was barred until 1922, while Doukhobor immigrants remained inadmissible until 1926. Nevertheless, Canada still accepted those immigrants who were “bona fide agriculturalists, labourers, and domestics, all of whom were classified according to a system of preferred and nonpreferred countries.”<sup>50</sup> There was an immigration bureau in the city of Rovno, the administrative capital of Volhynia, where those seeking to depart for North America usually began their journey.

Russian Mennonite migrants of the 1920s displayed much the same patterns of employment. Farming undoubtedly was the first preference for these skilled agriculturalists. However, as noted by Frank Epp, “working for hourly wages was a necessity for hundreds of the first immigrants, ... whose settlement on their own land was held up for nearly a year.”<sup>51</sup> At that, if Russian Mennonites could often count upon their more established co-religionists, migrants of the 1870s, Slavic Evangelical Christians often had to rely only upon themselves.

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<sup>49</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, 152.

<sup>50</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, 153.

<sup>51</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, 188.

The first family of Evangelical Christians that settled near Benito (in Thunderhill, a few miles away) and later became members of the church was Steve (Stepan) Roda, his wife and daughter.<sup>52</sup> They settled in Thunderhill in 1928. The first families from Volhynia who settled in Benito were Sebastian Leskewich and Brothers Stephen (Stepan) and Paul (Pavlo) Bielik. They met in the Rovno immigration office, and decided to travel together. Both Leskewich and brothers Bielik were Evangelical believers already in the old country. They arrived in Winnipeg in late May of 1929 and were met by Evangelical Christian activists of Belorussian origin who had come to Canada much earlier, Ivan (John) Guk (also spelled Huk) and Ignatii (Ignace) Sidorchuk. Both Guk and Sidorchuk were at the time leaders of the emerging community of Evangelical Christians in Canada. They directed the newcomers to the Alpine (a few miles from Benito) district with the hope that they would find employment or buy land easier than in more urbanized or populated areas.<sup>53</sup> In July 1929 another small group of Evangelical Christians from Volhynia came to the area: David Naydiuk and family, Luke Naydiuk and family, and Andrew Blocha and family. Naturally, those believers, in spite of their adverse economic conditions, and the confusion of the initial months in a new country, sought contacts with the like-minded. The first informal Evangelical worship meeting in the Benito district took place in September 1929 when another Evangelical believer from Hyas, Saskatchewan, Iakiv Prychidko visited the newcomer Paul Bielik whom he had known in the old country. Together they travelled to the Naydiuk farm by horse, and had the first joint Evangelical meeting. Of course, at that point there was no established leadership in the church. It emerged a month later, when a prominent Ukrainian Baptist preacher and

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<sup>52</sup> *Church in the Valley*, Lydia McKinnon, compiler (Winnipeg: 1985), 19.

<sup>53</sup> *Church in the Valley*, 13.

leader in Western Canada, Petro Kindrat, assumed temporary pastoral care over the newborn church. October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1929 is considered the birth date of the Benito church.<sup>54</sup> Yet, since Stepan Roda, who converted in Poland, and eventually became pastor of the Benito church, arrived to the district in 1928, this year was chosen as a starting point in the development of the church, and was reflected in the title of this thesis. Kindrat appointed Luke Naydiuk as an acting pastor of the small group. Very soon pastoral office became a shared ministry among capable brothers. Luke (Luka) Naydiuk, Stephen (Stepan) Roda, Bernatsky, Andrew (Andrii) Petelski, Paul (Pavlo) Kudryk, Paul (Pavlo) Bielik, Leskewich, and others preached in turns and shared pastoral responsibilities.

The following interview took place in the house of Anna and Mike Gnida, lifelong members of the church. Mr. Gnida, an elderly gentleman in his 70-ies, was the last deacon of the church prior to its dissolution. A farmer by occupation, he nevertheless had an extensive experience addressing public, which was a part of his church duties. Mr. Gnida led the conversation. He spoke English (for the most part) and a peculiar mixture of Ukrainian and Russian, which the interviewer, sufficiently familiar with both languages, cannot unequivocally define as either one of them. Mrs. Gnida spoke only in English, although she understood what was being said in Ukrainian and Russian. The Gnidas recalled the early period of the existence of the community in the following words:

Anna Gnida: My parents came because my uncle was already in Canada. And they lived with him until they got established... There was land available if you had money.

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<sup>54</sup> Petro Kindrat, *The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada*, 72.

Interviewer: I've heard that when they came they had to do whatever, like menial jobs, chopping wood...

Mike Gnida: Yea, that's true...My dad bought land quite quick, because his mother said: "When you come to Canada, buy land right away!" And so my father did. But that wasn't a good decision, because that was in [19]29, and in [19]31-32... depression. So what he bought, animals, cows, he sold it for less money than he bought it. It wasn't a good time, but they survived. My dad worked hard.<sup>55</sup>

Again, as in the case of the Verigins, the theme of the Great Depression as an important landmark of the collective memory is apparent. The arrival time seemed to have been permanently tied up to the time of the beginning of the economic downturn, which was perceived as the main challenge newcomers had to face even by the second-generation narrators. The interviewer did not ask the informants about how their families acquired land. The topic of land came about somewhat inadvertently, and both informants chose to address it. This is not surprising, given the farming background of the family. But at the same time this suggests the significance land and owning land had for these newcomers. Mr. Gnida, of course, could not have heard his grandmother (who never made it to Canada) advising his father to buy land immediately. This was, so to speak, a family legend. But no matter whether she really said that or not, the account stands true, for "the perception of an account as 'true' is relevant as much to legend as to personal experience and historical memory,"<sup>56</sup> and attests to the importance of land as a motivation, a goal, and a symbol of the migration.

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<sup>55</sup> Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop*, 12 (Autumn, 1981): 99.

Mike Gnida was born in Minitonas, Manitoba, a village in the vicinity of Benito. His parents came to Canada from near Zdolbunov in Volhynia. In 1931 some Trofimchuk from Minitonas wrote a short letter to *Evangel'skaia vera*. The letter read: "We are about 40 believers here. We are all immigrants from Poland, from different places and communities, but here we are all one community. Unemployment hit us hard; please pray for us so that we could stay awake."<sup>57</sup> We do not find the last name Trofimchuk in the later history of the Benito church. He could have left the area seeking better work opportunities, which was not uncommon for Slavic immigrants to the area. Another Evangelical believer, Nadezhda Balagurova-Protsiuk, born in 1909 in Zolotiev, near Rovno, Volhynia, immigrated to Canada with her husband in 1930, and initially settled in Cando, Saskatchewan. The young couple intended to farm, but already in 1931 they moved to Ontario "seeking work," and were hired to pick strawberries. Then they lived in the city of Waterford, Ontario in the wintertime, and moved to nearby farms for seasonal work in the summer.<sup>58</sup> Engaging in agricultural enterprise at that time would have been a rather imprudent decision. According to Gerald Friesen, "no major Canadian industry suffered as much as agriculture in the economic downswing, and none recovered so slowly." At that, 1931 was the year of famous dust storms in the Prairies.<sup>59</sup>

The memorial photo of the founding members of the Benito church taken on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1929, pictures twenty people, at least eight of them children in front of the shabby storage shed or a stable.<sup>60</sup> Apparently, the first services were held on the farm rented or owned by Mr. Lipka, one of the founding members of the community. None of

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<sup>57</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 5 (1932), 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 9 (1933), 16.

<sup>59</sup> Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 386.

<sup>60</sup> *Church in the Valley*, 12.

the original member families had cars at the time the church was founded. They had to use horses or walk great distances in order to get to the meeting.

Another small group of Evangelical believers from Volhynia settled in the nearby Thunderhill district by 1930. At first, due to lack of reliable means of transportation and good roads, they met separately for Sunday worship. On special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter, they held joint meetings in the Benito Doukhobor meetinghouse. Petro Kindrat continued to take care of the Benito community for a few initial years while new families and individuals from Volhynia were coming to the area.

Thus, up to the time the group decided to build its own prayer home in the village of Benito (1941), we have two clusters of Slavic Evangelical believers in two neighbouring districts, Alpine and Thunderhill. They tried to co-ordinate their efforts; gather jointly as often as they could, yet, they were somewhat separated by the distances and, especially, poor roads and lack of transportation. Nevertheless, members of both local groups felt they belonged to one church community, and worked towards the goal of further integration. The Sunday services were “held in homes alternately at that time,” while for Christmas and Easter services Evangelicals gathered in the Benito Doukhobor prayer home.<sup>61</sup>

The group maintained records of its life and kept detailed records of business meetings, baptisms, weddings, and visits of believers from other localities. Most of them are lost, but some are still kept by former members, including Mike Gnida, who was deacon at the final stage of the existence of the community. The sample below (see Illustration 2) is one of these historical records in the possession of Mr. Gnida. Such records during the initial stage in the life of the Benito church were written down in what

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<sup>61</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 19.

appears to be Russian with numerous Ukrainian words, apparently used when the record keeper did not know the appropriate bookish Russian word or expression. At the same time all or almost all families that formed the nucleus of the Benito church were Ukrainians and nationals of Poland, and always used their local dialect of Ukrainian for family and group communication. The deliberate use of Russian for the purposes of record-keeping is easy to understand considering the fact that Volhynia had been part of the Russian Empire for at least 120 years prior to its inclusion into the Polish state which took place in 1918, that is, only 11 years before the arrival of the first Benito Evangelicals. Thus, adult newcomers, mainly couples with children at the time of arrival, probably received their school instruction in Russian when Volhynia was still part of Russia. In addition to this, Ukrainian immigrants from Volhynia apparently felt closer cultural, historical and linguistic affinity with Russia than with Poland. That is why using Polish was not an option even though they must have had a command of the Polish language as well. The linguistic situation of Ukrainian Evangelicals in Benito closely resembles that of “russophile” Ruthenians in Austro-Hungarian Galicia who used in their literature a language based upon literary Russian, Old Church Slavonic and the local Galician dialect.<sup>62</sup>

Although historically Evangelical Christians in Volhynia belonged to Prokhanov’s Union and then to its subsidiary, the Polish church of Evangelical Christians, at first the Benito group remained unaffiliated. Pastoral care of Petro Kindrat, among other things, pursued a goal of incorporating the Benito group into the Ukrainian Baptist Union of Western Canada. Ukrainian Baptist groups in Manitoba and elsewhere in

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<sup>62</sup> Please see a sample of this language in Appendix 8.1 of Paul Magosci, *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism* (Toronto, London, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 147-155.

Western Canada consisted mainly of immigrants from Galicia who were mostly recent converts from the Ukrainian Catholic (less frequently Orthodox) church.

The first reference to Benito in *Evangel'skaia vera* occurred in 1931. In September of that year a Canadian Conference of Evangelical Christians took place in Toronto. One of the delegates, Polina Kovalevskaia, a prominent Evangelical Christian activist and women's leader, an immigrant from Volhynia, shared a report on her trip to western Canada.<sup>63</sup> Kovalevskaia had spent some time in Manitoba, among Slavic believers, and mentioned that those of Benito especially sought to keep the purity of the teaching of Christ, and "desire to have communion with all true believers." At the same Conference Kovalevskaia was elected the head of the women's movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada. Simultaneously, Benito Evangelical Christians made their step toward the goal of communion with fellow-believers. Luka Naidiuk, the one of the acting leaders of the newborn community, addressed the Canadian Conference in Toronto with a letter, which was read publicly along with epistles from Prokhanov, the US Slavic Evangelical leader Shevchuk, and others.<sup>64</sup>

According to Petro Kindrat, in 1934, when the community became stronger and numbered a few dozen people (with children), church members decided formally to join the Canadian branch of the Prokhanovite Union. Kindrat and the leadership of the Ukrainian Union lamented this decision. Kindrat wrote in his book with poorly concealed irritation that he had founded and ministered to the Benito congregation until in 1934 it decided to join the "Russian" Union of Evangelical Christians.<sup>65</sup> This interpretation of the history is not consistent with other evidence in our possession. We know from the

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<sup>63</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1932), 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1932), 12.

<sup>65</sup> Kindrat, *Ukrainian Baptist Movement*, 73.

memoirs of the pioneers of the Benito congregation that the first Evangelical settlers were met in Winnipeg by Evangelical activists Guk and Sidorchuk. They suggested the newcomers might proceed to the area in order to let them find employment and purchase land more easily. They urged the newcomers to keep together. So Evangelical activists already did what they could to prevent dispersion of Slavic Evangelical immigrants in Canada. However the Slavic Evangelical Union in Canada came into existence only in September of 1930, that is, after Kindrat had discovered a cluster of Evangelical settlers and started supervising them.

Another misrepresentation of the history by Petro Kindrat is that he referred to the Evangelical Union as a “Russian” church. The worldwide brotherhood of Slavic Evangelicals, as we demonstrated in the previous chapter, was a truly multi-ethnic organization, which included great many Ukrainians, Belorussians, Poles, Bulgarians, Russian-born Germans, and representatives of smaller ethnic groups. In Canada in particular Ukrainians had always been a majority among Evangelical Christians.

There is a good evidence to support this argument from the ethnicity of the leadership of Canadian Evangelical Christians from its foundation in 1930 until 1980. The chairmen of the Canadian Union were in chronological order: Ivan Sidorchuk (Belorussian), Ivan Prokhanov (Russian), Tarasiuk (Ukrainian), Romaniuk (Ukrainian), Guk (Belorussian), Vetrov (Russian), Koliba (Ukrainian). Secretaries of the Union were (in chronological order) Shimuda, Shvets, Bernadsky, Vozniuk, Prityko. Judging by their last names, they all were either Ukrainian or Belorussian.<sup>66</sup> Communities of Evangelical Christians in Canada were free to use in their worship a language that suited their audience. The Songbook commonly used by Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada was

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<sup>66</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 329.

trilingual, and contained hymns and songs in English, Russian, and Ukrainian.<sup>67</sup> The Foreword to the edition stated: “*Christian Songs* is unique in that three languages are used. Evangelical Christian churches in English-speaking countries have some regular attendants who speak only Russian, or Ukrainian, or English.”<sup>68</sup> Liudvig Shenderovskii (a Pole by origin) emphasized that “Slavic Evangelical Christians always loved and respected all ethnic groups. That is why nationalism among Evangelical Christians in Canada was not encouraged, and elevation of one ethnicity over another was not tolerated.”<sup>69</sup> As we can see, the working model of the brotherhood of Evangelical Christians was essentially multicultural, in some aspects anticipating the Canadian policy of multiculturalism implemented from early 1970s onwards. So what did Kindrat mean when he called the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada, an organization with mainly Ukrainian membership and leadership, a “Russian church”? He did not like the fact that the Union of Slavic Evangelicals was *not*, unlike Kindrat’s Baptist Union of Western Canada, a Ukrainian national organization. Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada did not support the goals and ideology of Ukrainian nationalism, and frankly recognized the historical bond between East Slavic peoples in general, and a shared history of Slavic Protestantism in particular.

The year 1934, when, according to Kindrat, the Benito community joined the Evangelical Christian Union, does not seem accurate, either. In early 1932 *Evangel’skaia vera* informed its readers that the All-Canadian Conference of Evangelical Christians would take place in Benito on June, 16-19, 1932. It looks highly improbable that the

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<sup>67</sup> *Christian Songs. Khristianskie Pesni. Khristians’ki Pisni*, compiled by John K. Huk and Gene Dulin (Weston, Ontario: Toronto Christian Mission).

<sup>68</sup> *Christian Songs*, Foreword, i-iii.

<sup>69</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 329.

Slavic Evangelical brotherhood decided to let the Benito community host its national conference without that church being part of the wider Fellowship. In January, 1932 Ignatii Sidorchuk, the Evangelical leader from Toronto, went on a pastoral trip to Manitoba. Benito was the first church he visited. Sidorchuk colourfully described frost and snowy storm “which hardly can happen in Toronto” that he had to endure before he got to the Durban train station in the vicinity of Benito. A postman finally took him to Luka Naidiuk’s, since Sidorchuk was quite disoriented and could not find his destination on his own. Sidorchuk reported: “Believers here live fairly far away from each other, that is why it is difficult for them to attend meetings regularly... During my five-day stay there, the Lord permitted us to have meetings in various locations... In spite of the extreme poverty of many brothers and sisters, great distances, frost, and snowy storms, they gladly made 20 miles to get to a meeting. The God’s word had a special power.”<sup>70</sup> The Benito members and Sidorchuk agreed to maintain close contacts, and the guest proceeded to Saskatoon.<sup>71</sup>

What are some of the reasons Evangelical Christians of Benito preferred to join the numerically weaker Union of Evangelical Christians rather than the national Ukrainian Baptist Union which was very active in Manitoba? Firstly, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Evangelical Christians and Baptists, in spite of theological similarities, were two different denominations. Benito Evangelicals were not *tabula rasa* in terms of their religious views unlike most Galician converts to Baptism. Most of them had been members of the Evangelical church in the home country. Therefore, they naturally wanted to rejoin the church they felt themselves a part as soon

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<sup>70</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932), 14.

<sup>71</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932), 14.

as it became possible. Secondly, by being part of the Slavic Evangelical family, they recognized their spiritual, cultural, and linguistic unity with the Russian people. Galician Baptist Ukrainians, most of whom were immigrants from Austro-Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia and former Ukrainian Catholics, often did not have that sense of shared history or a feeling of closeness.

### **Doukhobors and Evangelical Christians**

As it was noted, Evangelical Christians from Volhynia came to an area already settled by a linguistically and culturally akin sect of the Doukhobors. By 1929 the branch of Independent Doukhobors completely split off from the communal Doukhobors, now led by Petr Chistiakov (Verigin), son of the late leader Peter (Petr) Vasilievich Verigin. Chistiakov was a person of bad temper and dubious moral qualities, so Independent Doukhobors of Saskatchewan, who still had a degree of respect (rather than obedience) for his father, did not consider Chistiakov their leader. According to Woodcock and Avakumovic, “[In 1930s] the Independents... were establishing more complex contacts with the world around them.”<sup>72</sup> At the time of the arrival of Evangelical Christians to Benito, Doukhobors had at least three permanent community buildings in the area: in Kamsack, Saskatchewan, Pelly, Saskatchewan, and Benito, Manitoba. The Evangelical Christians made use of the Benito Doukhobor prayer home from at least as early as 1932. The mentioned Conference of Evangelical Christians in June, 1932 in Benito took place “in the building of Doukhobors.”<sup>73</sup> Doukhobors did not just provide the building. The

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<sup>72</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 303.

<sup>73</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932), 29.

report published in *Evangel'skoe slovo* after the Conference informed that around 300 Doukhobors attended the Benito Conference.<sup>74</sup>

In 1933 Evangelical residents of two farming communities adjacent to the village of Benito, Thunderhill and Alpine, held joint Easter and Christmas worship meetings in the Benito Doukhobor prayer home. Sadie (Mosienko) Naydiuk, a former member of the Benito community, a teenager at that time, recalled this experience in the following words: “I remember the first Christmas concert that I attended. It was a real highlight for all of us and especially the children. It was held in Benito in the Doukhobor Hall. To bring the children ten to twelve miles on a cold winter’s night was not an easy task; so men borrowed the large Alpine school van, hitched their horses to it, and brought a load down to Benito for a concert... Many outsiders came to the concert... There was a Christmas tree for the children with real candles for lights, and candy bags too!”<sup>75</sup> This practice continued for at least eight years till 1941 when the Evangelical Christians finally erected their own prayer building in Benito. The project took a few years, for the Evangelical community decided to launch the construction in 1939. The level of accommodation of the Doukhobors to their Evangelical neighbours is amazing. Doukhobors not only gave permission to use their premises for strictly religious purposes, but also did not mind the activities that were generally not consistent with the viewpoint of the Doukhobors anti-ritualistic traditions such as concerts and a Christmas tree.

From 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of July, 1934 a “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” of Evangelical Christians in Canada was held in Benito. The host community was characterized as “a community members of which are scattered on farms within a few miles from each

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<sup>74</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 12 (1932), 24.

<sup>75</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 17.

other.”<sup>76</sup> This type of conferences was regularly held in different churches belonging to the Union of Evangelical Christians for the purposes of spiritual encouragement and instruction. Usually they were chaired by leadership of the Union. Guests from other Union churches also took part in the Conferences. The Benito Conference of 1934 was led by Ivan Prokhanov who at that time was residing temporarily in Toronto, Canada. It was held in the Benito Doukhobor prayer home. The Benito prayer home was closed down in the 1950s, but the photo below (see Illustration 3) taken in the functioning Kamsack prayer home gives the reader the idea of the interior of a Doukhobor prayer hall. The Conference of 1934 in Benito revolved around the idea of a “broadest mission” among the Slavs. Apparently, by that the Evangelical Christian church in Canada had become strong enough, and could expand its outreach after the initial task of uniting scattered communities had been completed. “It turned out that there are around half a million Russians, Ukrainians, and other Slavs in Canada. The number of believers compared to this is insignificant. That is why it was admitted that the greatest task of Evangelical Christians in Canada is the broadest Gospel mission.”<sup>77</sup> The vision of a conversion of Slavic peoples as a starting point of the new worldwide reformation was still at the forefront. Interestingly, Doukhobors “of all three branches,” that is, Community Doukhobors, Independents, and Sons of Freedom, attended the Conference.<sup>78</sup>

Mike Gnida, told the author about the relationship between their community and the Doukhobors:

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<sup>76</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 8-9 (1934), 23.

<sup>77</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 8-9 (1934), 22.

<sup>78</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 12 (1932), 23.

Mike Gnida: They had been here [before the Evangelicals came]. They used to come to us and sing. [He sings:] “We will all enter the house of the Father, and, may be, soon...” We sang the same psalms.

Interviewer: Did you have many Doukhobor converts in your church?

M.G.: Yes, we had Aleksei Malahoff and family. Then we had Fred (or Fiodor) Postnikoff, a Doukhobor. Mrs. Strukoff, that’s Malahoff’s sister. But it was mostly, like you said, mostly Ukrainians.

Interviewer: Were there any converts from among Evangelicals to the Doukhobor faith?

M.G.: No, I don’t think so. They sort of believe like we do, but there are some differences that I can’t really tell you about them, but... I know they sing the same psalms, but when we went to their funerals, they are a little bit different...<sup>79</sup>

That Doukhobors readily sang Slavic Evangelical hymns is certain.<sup>80</sup> Remarkably, singing the same songs in perception of Mr. Gnida constituted a similarity of belief. Apparently, there was a lot of interaction between the two groups on a purely human level. Attending each other’s funerals is, without doubt, a marker of close and respectful relationship between the two immigrant communities. Members of the both groups were well aware of the differences, but considered them relatively minor as compared to religious, cultural and language similarities. The informant suggested that Doukhobors beliefs closely resembled those of Evangelical Christians. In reality this is not so. The Doukhobor faith is not based upon the Bible, rituals of baptism and Lord’s supper are

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<sup>79</sup> Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.

<sup>80</sup> *Evangel’skaia vera*, 8-9 (1932), 13.

absent from the Doukhobor practice, and historically Doukhoborism evolved along the lines very distant from Protestantism. Yet, informant's words suggest a perception of closeness members of the groups entertained towards each other. Transfer from one group to another and intermarriage was smooth. Besides, they were neighbours and shared the same difficulties and challenges of a life in a remote rural area with harsh climate, underdeveloped infrastructure, and under adverse overall economic conditions, which, undoubtedly, created a sense of solidarity. Mike Gnida's personal archive contains a few photos attesting to the contacts between the two groups of Slavic religious dissenters in Canada (see Illustration 4). This black and white photo was taken in 1960s on the occasion of a visit to Benito of the Grand Forks Doukhobor choir from British Columbia. Grand Forks, a small town in the Kootenays, is a de facto capital of the British Columbia Doukhobors and a seat of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ<sup>81</sup> offices. The photo shows a group of women and men, the former in traditional Doukhobor dress and with head coverings, in front of the Benito church of Evangelical Christians.

Another periodic Evangelical event that was held every summer in the Doukhobor prayer home in Benito was the Bible Conference. It was often attended by local Doukhobors in spite of the fact that the traditional Doukhobor faith rejected dependence upon the text of the Bible.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Doukhobor Morozov addressed the delegates expressing his thankfulness for another an opportunity to be at the Evangelical Christian

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<sup>81</sup> USCC is the organization of the "Orthodox," or Community Doukhobors, traditionally led by leaders from the Verigin lineage. They are the mainstream and most numerous Doukhobor group in Canada. See their official website at <http://www.usccdoukhobors.org> (Link valid as of 4<sup>th</sup> of June, 2010)

<sup>82</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 23.

Conference in Benito and listen to the word of God!<sup>83</sup> In the early or mid-1930s Slavic Evangelicals approached the then leader of Doukhobors Petr Petrovich Verigin (Chistiakov) with an offer to buy the Benito Doukhobor prayer hall. Chistiakov asked them how much they would be willing to pay for the hall. The Evangelicals could offer only 50 dollars, and Chistiakov, who was at that time in dire straits economically, fighting “a losing battle against depression”<sup>84</sup> lost any interest in the deal, permitting them, however, to use the hall when they had a need.<sup>85</sup> This anecdotal evidence, whether factually true or not, nevertheless reflected the sense of inter-communal solidarity which existed between Evangelical Christians and Doukhobors.

### **Growth and Expansion**

From early on Slavic Evangelical Christians of Benito established contacts with English-speaking Protestants. One of the sessions of the “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” that took place in Benito in June, 1933 was bilingual. The reports said that since there were “English visitors” (*posetiteli iz anglichan*), the entire session was translated from one language to another.<sup>86</sup> Ivan Guk helped with translation. Guk, born in Pinsk (now Belorussia), immigrated to Canada in 1928. In spite of his relatively short stay in North America by 1933, his ability to translate from and into English is easy to explain. In 1931 Guk went to Chicago and studied the Bible and music at the famous Moody Bible Institute for two years.<sup>87</sup> The very fact of having English speaking guests at

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<sup>83</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 11 (1933), 24.

<sup>84</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 297.

<sup>85</sup> Sergey Petrov. Conversation with N., a member of the Kamsack Doukhobor Society, Kamsack, Saskatchewan, October 11, 2009.

<sup>86</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 11 (1933), 23.

<sup>87</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-12 (1938), 18.

a Conference in Benito church, as well as the involvement of Ivan Guk with the well-known North American Bible school suggest an early identification of the Benito church and the Canadian Slavic Evangelicals in general with Canadian and North American evangelicalism.

A close look at other instances of early contacts between Canadian evangelical mainstream and Slavic Evangelicals confirm this suggestion. Oswald Smith, a well-known Canadian preacher, evangelist, and the founder of the non-denominational Toronto People's Church was a guest speaker at a "Spiritual and Edifying Conference" held in Toronto in December, 1934. While Smith offered a "brief sermon" at the Conference, G. Janzen, a Mennonite presbyter from Kitchener, participated with his "deeply edifying and awakening" speeches.<sup>88</sup>

As the church grew, new forms of ministry emerged. A choir of the Benito congregation had a number of dedicated participants. Singing and musical culture in general has always been a very important part of the Ukrainian family and communal life. It is not surprising that Christian hymn singing became one of the earliest types of ministry that emerged in the young congregation. Later (in 1950s) the choir would even develop into a training center for church musicians, but it attained a fairly good level of performance much earlier. Quite often the choir successfully toured other churches in Western Canada. The choir (and the congregation) sang in Ukrainian and Russian. The choir gathered for practice every Saturday night at the homes of believers chosen to host a Sunday service the following day. Usually choir members stayed there overnight to spare a trip home.

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<sup>88</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 2 (1934), 12.

Periodicals published by Evangelical Christians were important channels of news and inspiration, binding together communities and families that were separated physically. A reader from Minitonas near Benito shared the joy and inspiration he got from *Evangel'skaia vera*. He confessed that he was spiritually sleeping, and the magazine woke him up. Regular updates on persecutions of believers in the USSR especially prompted his awakening. "News about suffering Lord's children in Russia made me think about them, pray for them, and sympathize with them." The reader sent in a payment and asked to mail him at least two extra copies of *Evangel'skaia vera* for the sick believers to help them keep spiritually awake.<sup>89</sup>

Another type of ministry that emerged in the Benito church quite early was a youth group and a children's group. Young people, most of them not yet members, comprised a significant part of participants at worship services and the church took care of their spiritual education till the time they got baptized to become full-fledged members. One of the former members described the children's group activities in the following words: "In the summer times I remember Polly D'iachenko [née Kovalevskaja] used to visit... the homes and played games with us. We thought she was just great. Then she would take us in the house, tell us Bible stories and sing with us. After that the hostess gave us all lunch."<sup>90</sup> Pelageia (also known as Polly) D'iachenko-Kovalevskaja) was a well-known Evangelical worker among women and children in Poland, who came to Canada from Volhynia in 1930. Apart from missionary work, Polly, a nurse by profession, provided necessary medical assistance such as delivering babies for those Slavic Evangelicals who lived in rural areas where doctors and hospitals were not readily

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<sup>89</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 4 (1933), 26.

<sup>90</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 21.

accessible.<sup>91</sup> A more organized form of work among the young was formal Sunday school, apparently instituted after the church had been built in 1941.

After Prokhanov's death in 1935 the level of involvement of the community in Benito did not suffer noticeable changes. In 1936 Benito hosted yet another "Spiritual and Edifying Conference," and *Evangel'skaia vera* published a photo of a baptism that took place during that gathering.<sup>92</sup> Polly D'iachenko-Kovalevskaia penned a report about her three month stay at Benito in 1936. According to the report, the church attendance in Benito reached 100 people (apparently, without small children). Kovalevskaia trained the Benito choir, which she was very pleased with. The women's circle sold their handicraft at the Conference, and the community bought New Testaments for children from poor families attending the community Sunday school. All Evangelical Christian communities in western Canada at that time had Sunday schools for children, women's and youth groups.<sup>93</sup>

In July, 1938 the 8<sup>th</sup> "Spiritual, Edifying, and Business Conference" of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada took place in Benito. Luke Naidiuk was the spokesman on behalf of the host community, while Ignatii Sidorchuk chaired the Conference, P. Petelski represented youth groups, and Polly Kovalevskaia – women's circles. All communities in Canada "with rare exceptions" had trained choirs and women's circles as of 1938. Women, along with spiritual work, were expected to earn money for the evangelical projects through selling handicraft. The earned monies were spent on mission,

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<sup>91</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 326.

<sup>92</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 10-12 (1937), 20.

<sup>93</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1-3 (1938), 10.

the church-run orphanage in Kovel' in Poland, construction of prayer houses, and to help poor families in the community.<sup>94</sup>

Slavic Evangelical women shared the responsibilities of providing for their families with their husbands. They were thrifty, usually experienced in a number of skills, such as sowing, knitting, and gardening, and very inventive. Along with that, women soon formed a ladies' group within the church to participate in the spiritual labour. The first ladies' meeting took place in January, 1937. Sadie Naydiuk, the first ladies' leader, recalled it in the following words: "I was young in the faith and craved Christian fellowship, so I attended the meeting to see what these dear sisters in the Lord were planning to do... But it shocked me to tears when they voted me in, to lead the group. I tried to explain I didn't know how to do it, ...but each dear women promised to help and pray – and pray and help they did."<sup>95</sup> The church and its life were deeply rooted in the family and family values. Usually the entire family unit was a part of the community, and children received substantial Christian instruction in their families.

New settlers continued to arrive throughout the 1930s till the World War began in September, 1939. However, by 1939 the community had dozens of members, and the general level of well-being of the members rose significantly. By late 1930s many members had vehicles and, probably, some savings. In 1939 the community decided to build a church in the village of Benito, approximately equidistant from the numerous farms where members resided. Brothers Jack Koziol, Steve Roda (pastor), Fred Naydiuk

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<sup>94</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 1-3 (1939), 14.

<sup>95</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 17.

and Alex Petelski took part in cutting lumber for the church in Alpine near the farm owned by the Blocha, also community members.<sup>96</sup>

It is worthwhile to mention that Jack Koziol left the church and the area in 1939 to become a famous and successful radio evangelist (see Illustration 5). Generations of Slavic Protestant believers in the USSR and beyond know and remember him under the name of Iakov Kozlov and his radio sermons broadcast from Toronto and Seoul, South Korea.<sup>97</sup>

The last mention of a church-wide event in Benito in *Evangel'skaia vera* occurred in 1939. Another “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” was going to be held in Benito in August of that year.<sup>98</sup> In 1940 the last issue of the church magazine was published in Tallinn. The same year the publication stopped following the annexation of Estonia by the USSR. Already in 1939 the editorial board had to apologize before readers for publication and delivery delays caused by the war that was flaring up in Europe. The church-wide magazine would be resumed only in the early 1960s in Chicago under the name *Evangel'skoe slovo* (The Word of Gospel).

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<sup>96</sup> *The Church in the Valley*, 23.

<sup>97</sup> A short biography of Iakov Kozlov (Koziol) compiled from different sources is found at a website devoted to prominent religious figures of the Russian diaspora worldwide at [http://ruszarubezhje.ru/kl/K\\_429.htm](http://ruszarubezhje.ru/kl/K_429.htm) (URL valid as of April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010). The translation of Kozlov's biography follows: “Iakov Kozlov was born in 1919 in the city of Rovno in the Ukraine into a Protestant family. In 1937 his family moved to Canada. He studied at a Bible Institute in the Canadian province of Alberta for five years, and graduated from it in 1951. For two years he was a pastor of the Evangelical Baptist church in the city of St Catharine's in Ontario, Canada. From 1957 Iakov Kozlov had been working at a Christian radio station in [South] Korea for twelve years along with his wife and a son. From 1969 till 1978, after his naturalization as a US citizen, he continued his work as a radio evangelist in the Philippines. In 1978 the Kozlovs returned to the United States of America. From that time on he worked as a director of the Russian department of the Christian mission “Far-East Broadcasting.” According to some reports, he also co-operated with the “Light in the East” (*Licht im Osten*) mission, Korntal, Germany. He worked as the host of the “Gospel Message” radio programs which were broadcast from the island of Saipan (USA) onto the territory of the former USSR. He died on 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 2003 in California.”

<sup>98</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 7-8 (1939), 16.

In 1941 the construction of the church was finished. However, the immigration from Europe stopped for a while in the time of war to resume only later, after 1945. However, the membership was increasing thanks to a high birth rate among the church members who often had fairly large families.

Another development that started to affect the community from early on was acculturation of children of the newcomers in the Canadian setting. Children born to recent immigrants became Canadian citizens by birth in the country. They attended English schools, and, generally, were exposed to the English language and Canadian culture from early on. At the same time, communication at church, in family, and, often among friends and neighbours was conducted in the heritage language. However, the second generation of Slavic Evangelical Christians, including those born in late 1920s and early 1930s were fully bilingual. They maintained their heritage language since in many cases this was the only way to communicate to their parents who often never in their lifetime acquired proficiency in English. Church served as another medium of keeping the language alive, since members born and raised outside Canada occupied positions of importance in the church for the few first decades of the existence of the community. A large number of Slavic-speaking people around Benito, especially Doukhobors and Galician Ukrainians, provided an important communication network capable of motivating the young generation to use their heritage language actively.<sup>99</sup> It was the third generation of Slavic Evangelicals in Benito (mostly people born after the WWII) that largely lost the knowledge of the heritage language.

The Benito congregation maintained active contacts with other like-minded churches. Although it was the only Slavic church of Evangelical Christians (Prokhanovite)

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<sup>99</sup> *Evangel'skaia vera*, 5 (1932), 11.

in Manitoba, there were other churches belonging to the same brotherhood in neighbouring Saskatchewan. Benito had particularly close ties with a geographically closest church of a village called Kuroki. Located about 140 kilometres away (as the crow flies) from Benito, Kuroki and area were populated by farmers, many of them of Ukrainian origin. The Evangelical community in Kuroki was formally established in 1942 and built its own meeting hall.<sup>100</sup> The members of the Benito congregation considered Kuroki a “sister church.”<sup>101</sup>

By the end of the early period of its history (1945) the Benito church members were predominantly Ukrainian. The Russian component was provided by converted Doukhobors (no more than ten members) and one or two other families that were likely Russian. A few families were Belorussian (ten or so members at most). Therefore, members of the Ukrainian origin comprised about 90% of the approximately 200 members the church had by the end of the period.

## **Conclusion**

The beginnings of the Benito church may be traced back to the influx of Ukrainian immigrants from the region of Volhynia, which belonged at that time to Poland in late 1920s. Before becoming part of Poland, the region had been a province of the Russian empire for an extended period of time. Many of the newcomers (although not all) were Evangelical Christians before their immigration to Canada. Although an overwhelming majority of Canadian Ukrainians were either Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate),

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<sup>100</sup> Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 331.

<sup>101</sup> *Church in the Valley*, 43.

or Orthodox, they formed a number of Ukrainian Protestant (mostly Baptist) churches due to the proselytising work of English and German missionaries among them.

Evangelical Christians, in spite of their doctrinal similarities with the Baptists, were a distinct denomination. Besides, Volhynian Ukrainians were different from Galicians in that they had lived in the Russian state for generations and had marked cultural and dialectal differences from the Galicians. Volhynian Ukrainians were well aware of their cultural, linguistic, spiritual and political ties to the Russian people. Evangelical Christianity was brought to Volhynia from St. Petersburg, the historical centre of that church in Russia. Therefore, the Benito Evangelicals chose to join the Prokhanovite union in Canada as soon as it was established, and identify as a Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians, an open church home for all like-minded Slavic believers.

Their close contacts with the Doukhobors and the interpersonal relationships and friendships that developed as a result, contributed to the multi-ethnic character and attitudes of the Benito church. The Benito community stood out for its ethnic, linguistic and cultural inclusiveness and non-involvement in politics at any level. From its first years the church in Benito, following non-denominational vision of Slavic Evangelicals, regarded itself as a part of larger world of evangelicalism. The Benito church, as well as other communities of the movement, maintained friendly and close relations with English-speaking evangelicals, Mennonites, and other religious bodies they considered like-minded. Main tendencies in the development of the Benito community of the period replicated or paralleled identical developments within the broader world of Canadian evangelicalism. Some of them were the involvement with the Bible school movement,

home and foreign mission, and Christian radio broadcasting. These tendencies point to the fact that Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada was an instance of Canadian ethnic evangelicalism.

Early Slavic Evangelical settlers faced a number of challenges upon their arrival to Canada. They struggled for survival in the midst of the economic downturn and, later, for a better future for their children. They found and affirmed their own religious and ethnic identity in an environment of unstable and changing religious and ethnic boundaries. However, possibly, the greatest metamorphosis they unwittingly underwent was their sudden transformation from members of a religious minority in the old country into part of the Canadian religious mainstream. This, as we shall see in the following chapters, had a powerful effect upon their fate as a distinct group of Slavic Canadians.

In the early period members of the Benito church, most of them foreign born immigrants, maintained the native tongue as the primary means of family and group communication, while the church community reinforced the use of the language. At the same time, while first generations settlers had a limited knowledge of the English language, the second generation was already fully bilingual. Yet, the heritage language remained the only feasible means of communication between members of different generations. The early period was also the time of the rapid numerical growth of the church, due to high birthrate and a steady immigration from Poland.

By 1901, that is, about thirty years after their immigration to Canada, among “Russian” Mennonites of the Hanover district in Manitoba “not a single Hanover child between ages three and five was able to speak English.”<sup>102</sup> In general, the level of the English proficiency among Mennonite settlers was very low even after a few decades of

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<sup>102</sup> Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 76.

their life in Canada due to their closed lifestyle and multiple economic and social connections within the community which made outside contacts unnecessary, especially for women and small children. Slavic Evangelicals followed a different pattern. While trying to maintain the heritage language, they saw English proficiency as a way to succeed in the new environment. Their religious affiliation effectively made the Slavic Evangelicals a part of the Canadian religious mainstream, rather than emphasized their separation from the rest of the society as in the case of the Mennonites.

At an early stage, the Prokhanovite brotherhood of diaspora churches was still enthusiastic about the new stage of the worldwide reformation, the renewal of the Christian faith and commitment, or the “revolution of the spirit,” and Slavic churches of Evangelical Christians were seen as the ferment of this great movement on a global scale.<sup>103</sup> The emergence and the early period in the history of the congregation coincided with the sojourn of Ivan Prokhanov in Canada and his personal involvement in the affairs of the emerging Slavic Evangelical Union of Canada. This boosted the activities of the church, and strengthened the motivation, dedication, and creativity of its pioneering members. The figure of Prokhanov was a truly charismatic one. Even given the democratic character of Evangelical community and the collegial management of church affairs, Prokhanov provided his followers with genuinely charismatic leadership, which, according to Weber, is “the greatest revolutionary force.”<sup>104</sup> At the time the Benito church emerged, the Slavic Evangelical movement maintained its belief in the imminent

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<sup>103</sup> Shenderovskii quotes Prokhanov’s spiritual testimony as of 1933 (*Evangelical Christians*, 392-92): “This [new] propagation of Gospel should be done in the spirit of the original apostolic preaching, and should have “the restoration of original Christianity” as its motto. There is no other Christian organization [sic!] which would be as ready for this task as the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians.”

<sup>104</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press and The Falcon’s Wing Press, 1947), 363.

spiritual revolution and in a great mission to the Slavic peoples. These hopes were doomed to fade at a later stage, after the death of Ivan Prokhanov in 1935, the fusion of the Evangelical Christians with the Baptists in the USSR in 1944, and the cutting off contacts with Evangelical Christians in Eastern Europe.

Illustration 1. Handwritten minutes of one of the early business meetings of the Benito congregation, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1930. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. M. Gnida

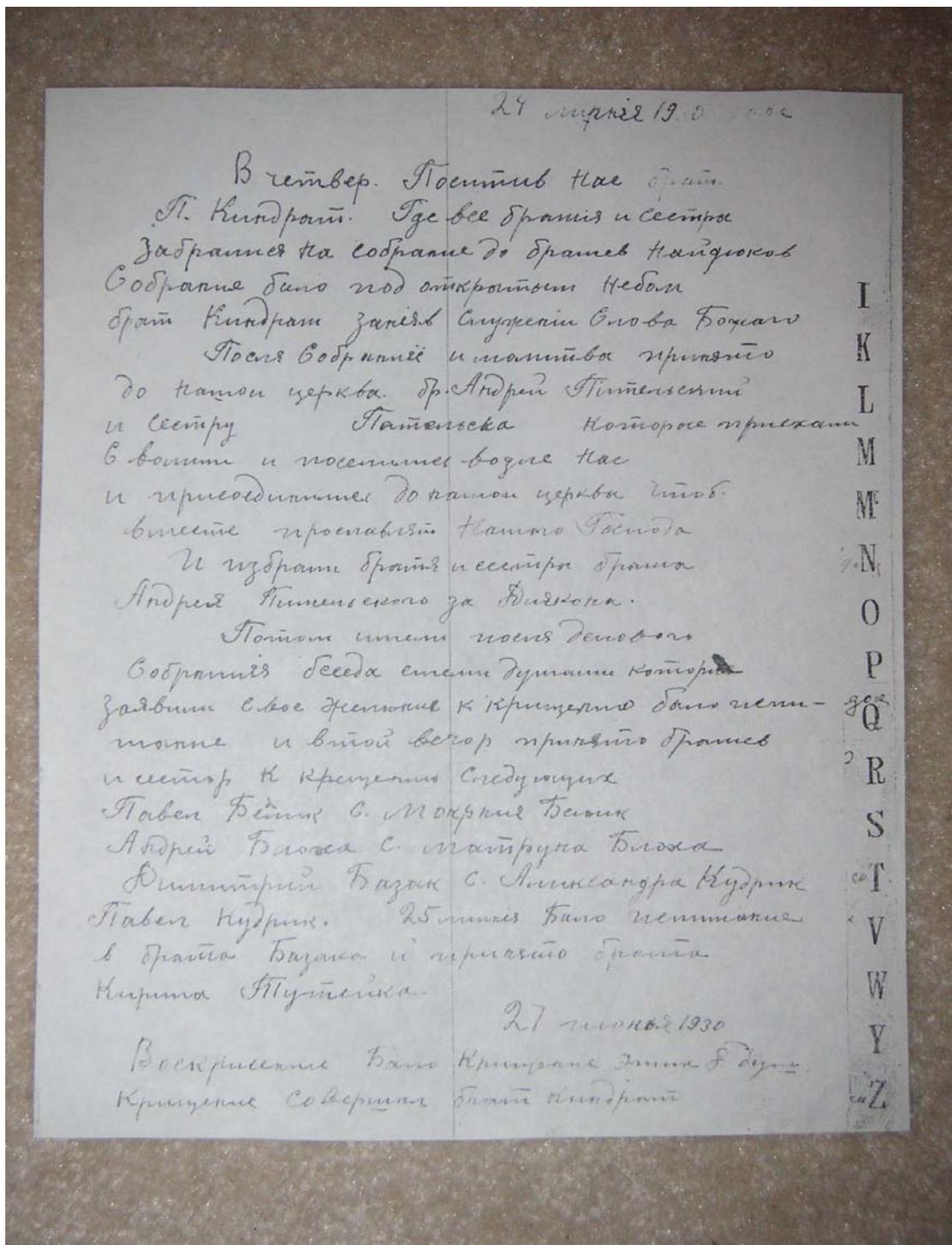


Illustration 2. The interior of the Kamsack Doukhobor Prayer Home. Benito Evangelical Christians frequently used its premises for their reunions.



Illustration 3. The Grand Forks Doukhobor choir in front of the Benito Evangelical church. 1960s. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Gnida.



Illustration 4. Iakov Kozlov (1919-2003), a prominent Slavic Evangelical radio evangelist, a Benito church member in his young years. Photo taken from [http://ruszarubezhje.ru/kl/K\\_429.htm](http://ruszarubezhje.ru/kl/K_429.htm), a site devoted to Russian religious emigration.

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