

## **Obedience Ends Where Evil Begins: Church-State Relations in the Former Soviet Union from a baptistic Perspective**

Joshua T. Searle

After some preliminary remarks about the ongoing legacy of the Soviet system, this article opens with a sketch of church-state relations from a biblical and theological perspective. The article concludes with some observations about how a ‘baptist vision’<sup>1</sup> (McClendon) of a free church in a free state could provoke new thinking about the renewal of church and society in the post-Soviet era. My argument is that a baptistic<sup>2</sup> vision of peace, justice and freedom in Christ, could help the church in Eastern Europe to drive a wooden stake through the heart of the Soviet system and help the people of the former USSR to emerge from the difficult travails of the post-Soviet transition.

### **Keywords**

Church; state; baptistic; civil society; Russia; Ukraine

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<sup>1</sup> This article, following the lead of James Wm. McClendon Jr, uses an intentionally lower-case ‘b’ in the descriptive term, ‘baptist’. McClendon claimed that baptistic communities constitute a worldwide Christian grouping with a distinctive theological heritage, which is neither Protestant nor Catholic. McClendon sought to emphasise that the ‘baptist vision’ which he advocates is not confined to a specific ‘Baptist’ denomination, but encompasses a whole range of ‘baptistic’ expressions of Christianity. This strand of Christian tradition is associated with the Radical Reformation, and includes Baptists, Mennonites, Brethren, some expressions of Pentecostalism, and believers’ churches among others — see McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1: Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 26-34. This approach, admittedly, is not without its critics, even among those who are sympathetic towards those who favour the ‘baptistic’ rather than ‘Baptist’ label. Paul Fiddes notes the danger that this label could be used to create ‘a highly personalized view of what it means to be baptist’ (Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p.14).

<sup>2</sup> The theological use of the adjective, ‘baptistic’, is a coinage of the IBTS (Centre) community. The term was introduced in Lina Andronovienė and Parush R. Parushev, ‘Church, State, and Culture: On the Complexities of Post-soviet Evangelical Social Involvement’, *Theological Reflections: EAAA Journal of Theology* 3 (2004): 174-227. It was thoroughly defined in the Editorial Introduction to Rollin G. Grams and Parush R. Parushev, eds., *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity: Listening to the Churches in Armenia, Bulgaria, Central Asia, Moldova, North Caucasus, Omsk, and Poland* (Prague: IBTS, 2006). As defined there, ‘By “baptistic” [communities] is meant those of the Free Church and believers’ baptism tradition. This term is used as an umbrella term for a variety of believing communities (“gathering” churches) practising believers’ baptism, and demanding radical moral living, such as Baptists or Pentecostals. It can also include a number of other groups in the regions, such as Adventists and [Mennonite] Brethren. It excludes churches in which members think in terms of ethnicity or geographical and political boundaries and in which people typically baptise their children into these ethno-geo-religio-identities. That is, “baptistic” excludes traditionally state sponsored ecclesial bodies.’ (Ibid., 10).

## Introduction

Europe today is experiencing a resurgence of nationalism, xenophobia and nativist populism. This has led to such phenomena as Brexit and massive electoral gains for extremist parties from France<sup>3</sup> to Hungary.<sup>4</sup> Europe seems to be on the brink of a radical, revolutionary change. Discourse which one used to associate with Bavarian beerhalls in the 1920s and 30s has become normalised and is gaining broad coverage and acceptance.<sup>5</sup> It seems that a new world is coming into being. This is a world that is moved not by the Christian values of love, compassion and solidarity, truth and justice, but by power, by the racial politics of blood and soil, and the demonic power of collective national identity and the media-fabricated will of the people. In light of these formidable challenges, followers of Christ today need to formulate a robust, biblical and theologically-informed theology of nationhood, identity and the relationship between the church, the state, and civil society. It is my conviction that the recent history of post-Soviet Ukraine affords many lessons about how to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and compassion and promote peace, justice and reconciliation in these uncertain times.

It is often assumed that the Soviet Union ceased to exist in December 1991 when the Soviet hammer and sickle flag was lowered from the Kremlin and replaced by the white-blue-red horizontal striped flag of the Russian Federation. However, flags are merely decorative embellishments, whose meaning is outward and symbolic.<sup>6</sup> The changing of the flags and the redrawing of the political maps could not conceal the fact that the Soviet Union, as a subjective reality, far outlived the political demise of the Soviet Communism.<sup>7</sup> In many respects, the Soviet Union is alive and well in 2020 — obviously not the political entity, but the Soviet mentality lives on in countless mundane acts and attitudes of millions of people who live today in the countries of the former USSR. The anthropological prototype, *homo sovieticus*,<sup>8</sup> lives on in the mentality and culture of the post-Soviet nations.

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<sup>3</sup> Brigitte Beuzamy, 'Explaining the Rise of the Front National to Electoral Prominence: Multi-Faceted or Contradictory Models?' in *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, ed. by Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik, and Brigitte Mrai (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 177-90.

<sup>4</sup> András Kovács, 'The Post-Communist Extreme-Right: The Jobbik Party in Hungary', in *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, ed. by Ruth Wodak and others, pp. 223-34.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Hainsworth, ed., *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Pinter, 2000); Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Tim Marshall Elliott, *Worth Dying for: The Power and Politics of Flags* (London: Elliott and Thompson, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Krzysztof Tyszka, 'Homo Sovieticus Two Decades Later', *Polish Sociological Review* 4 (2009): 507-22.

<sup>8</sup> This term was used by the prominent social critic Aleksandr Zinoviev in his book of the same title. See Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus* (London: Paladin, 1986). The term is based on the notion of the 'new Soviet man' (*новый советский человек*) developed by Soviet propagandists to promulgate the idea of a new

The spirit of Soviet communism and the servile, degrading and dehumanising ideology associated with it lives on to this day and it continues to affect every aspect of public life, including church-state relations in the so-called former USSR.

Taking this into account, this article opens with a sketch of church-state relations from a biblical and theological perspective. I will then conclude with some observations about how a ‘baptist vision’ (McClendon)<sup>9</sup> of a ‘free church in a free state’<sup>10</sup> could provoke new thinking about the renewal of church and society in the post-Soviet era. My argument is that a baptist vision of peace, justice and freedom in Christ, could help the church in Eastern Europe to drive a wooden stake through the heart of the Soviet system and help the people of the former USSR to emerge from the difficult travails of the post-Soviet transition.

## **Church and State under Soviet Communism and Post-Soviet Authoritarianism**

For many Protestants in Russia and Ukraine, Soviet history is the history of a marginal existence, or rather, a constant struggle for survival.<sup>11</sup> The projection of this experience into the present time tends to engender the idealisation of marginality and withdrawal from the world as the most faithful mode of Christian existence. Therefore, among the Russian Protestant community the custom has been to suffer in silence, to make any compromises that are necessary to safeguard their interests. Unfortunately, Russian and Ukrainian Protestant spirituality, especially during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, has tended to be shaped by fear. Fear causes people to avoid dangerous topics, to bury their heads in the sand and to focus on the most prosaic personal interests. If Christians remain in a state of fear, they tend not to talk about social responsibility, justice, truth, freedom, solidarity,

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generation of people who would be endowed with Soviet virtues of discipline, selflessness, hard work and intelligence as a result of being nurtured in and by a Soviet culture.

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere I have expounded at length on the meaning and application of the ‘baptist vision’, as formulated by McClendon. See Joshua T. Searle, ‘The Ecumenical Imperative and the Kingdom of God: Towards a baptistic perspective on church unity’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 14:1 (2013): 7-13. As well as encompassing the characteristics of biblicism, liberty, discipleship, community and mission, the baptist vision constitutes a ‘hermeneutical principle’, which posits a ‘shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community’. See McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> This terminology is derived from Nigel Wright’s important work, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005). Wright maintains that the baptist vision of a ‘free church in a free state’ expresses more than negative resistance to injustice or legal prohibitions, but constitutes ‘positive understandings of God’s will for church and world which have been overlooked, neglected or suppressed in the church they [Baptists] inherited’ (ibid., xvi).

<sup>11</sup> Joshua T. Searle and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological education and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), p. 123. See also, Parush Parushev and Toivo Pilli, ‘Protestantism in Eastern Europe to the Present Day’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, ed. by Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

or the transformation of society. They turn, instead, to discussions about distant and abstract categories, such as the soul and eternity. The information deficit provides a pseudo-theological justification for passivity and conformity. As the Russian proverb puts it: ‘The less you know, the sounder you sleep.’<sup>12</sup> In an environment where knowledge is dangerous, people prefer not to know, and if they do know, then they would rather not talk about it.

Sectarian withdrawal and passive marginality and inertia were therefore essentially the default modes of evangelical communities during the Soviet era, and this attitude continued well into the post-Soviet period.<sup>13</sup> Yet in 2013/14, a major tectonic shift occurred in the ways that post-Soviet evangelicals related to the state and to civil society. The Revolution of Dignity and Freedom in Ukraine in 2013/14, otherwise known as the Maidan protests, prompted new thinking among post-Soviet churches concerning the meaning and significance of basic terms, such as ‘power’, ‘the world’, ‘culture’, and ‘freedom’ in the light of the gospel witness.<sup>14</sup> There has been a radical re-evaluation of the demarcation between the spheres of legitimate influence of the church, the state, and society.<sup>15</sup> The maps of the sacred and profane, religious and social have been redrawn. Church leaders from across the denominations now acknowledge that the role of the church is to discern between good and evil, and to illuminate the front line in the spiritual battle against the powers and principalities that manifest themselves in social structures and political institutions, and to make the Kingdom of God a visible reality in the public sphere.<sup>16</sup>

The Revolution of Dignity and its aftermath have led to the conviction that the church is called to engage with society, rather than withdraw from it. Political neutrality, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer realised long ago, is no longer an option for the church.<sup>17</sup> The more persistently the church stays silent about politics, the more numerous are the questions it faces: What is it protecting or justifying with its silence? What is its real position? Whose side is it on? Does it have anything to say about current concerns? Is the church ready to move beyond the eternal, abstract, and distant and weigh in on the tangible,

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<sup>12</sup> David Satter, *The Less You Know, The Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *Baptizm bez kavychek. Ocherki i materialy k diskussii obudushchem yevangel'skikh tserkvey* (Cherkassy: Kollokvium, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Mykhailo Cherenkov, ‘The Evangelical Church in Soviet Society: Dialectics of Adaptation and Reform’, *Keston Newsletter* 21 (2015), pp. 26-41; Catherine Wanner, ‘Religion and Political Crisis in Ukraine’, *Euxeinos* 17 (2015): 4-7.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Sagan, ‘Church-State Relations After Maidan’, *Euxeinos* 17 (2015): 67-71.

<sup>16</sup> Arkhymandryt Kyrylo (Hovorun), *Ukrayins'ka Publychnaya Teolohyya* (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2017), pp. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 33.

burning issues of the present? By not protecting the victims of state violence, the church is complicit in the crimes of the governing regime; by not calling evil that which is evil, the church colludes with the criminals.<sup>18</sup>

## **Baptist/Anabaptist Obligations towards the State**

In common with every citizen, ‘baptist’ Christians have a clear responsibility towards the state. This responsibility consists in maintaining order and staying within the law. Those who follow Christ are obedient to the authorities, on condition that these authorities carry out their activities in compliance with the laws of the land and in accordance with the higher, moral law of truth and justice. However, obedience ends where evil begins. For followers of the Way of Christ, it is not the government, but moral conscience informed by the teachings of the Scriptures, which determines what is good and what is evil. If a contradiction arises between one’s duty of obedience towards the state and one’s biblically-informed convictions concerning good and evil, then the disciple is under a gospel obligation to ‘obey God rather than any human authority’ (Acts 5:29).

Standing in the tradition of the Radical Reformation, the political vocation of baptist communities is to distinguish between good and evil, and thus to legitimise the power that protects from evil, and to delegitimise the power that serves evil. When those in power violate their legal and moral boundaries, they should not only be denied obedience, but should be actively resisted, as the great anabaptist forebears from Felix Mantz to Balthasar Hubmaier once did.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in distinguishing between good and evil, the early anabaptists taught that the church has a sacred duty to resist the lawless authority of the state, when such a state rewrites laws for itself and turns the legal system into a tool for the misappropriation of power and wealth by the state authorities.

Unfortunately, among many post-Soviet Protestants we hear about obedience much more often than resistance. Usually biblical proof-texts, such as Romans 13, are cited out of context to build a case for passive toleration of evil and corrupt regimes. This occurred, infamously, in Germany under the Nazi regime when church leaders cited from Romans 13:1 in order to make a pseudo-biblical case for supporting Adolf Hitler.<sup>20</sup> Yet, a careful reading of the Bible reveals many examples of resistance to

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Rufus Burrow, Jr., *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theology of Resistance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1976), pp. 102-13.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, John Henry Queripel, *Bonhoeffer: Prophet and Martyr* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), p. 7; See also, Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Dietrich Bonhoeffer’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. by Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 139-40.

oppressive power. For instance, in 1 Samuel we read about God's stern disapproval of the establishment of political power in Israel. In Ecclesiastes the Preacher decries all political authority as vanity and hollow conceit. In the New Testament, the condemnation of political authority is even more explicit. Jesus declares that control of political power is in the hand of Satan (Matthew 4:9).<sup>21</sup> Paul asserts that all political powers are destined for annihilation and judgement (1 Corinthians 15:24), and in the Book of Revelation all political powers and institutions are condemned and destroyed together with the great Babylon in the final apocalyptic conflagration that precedes the coming of a new heavens and a new earth.

Baptists have learned from their painful history that servile obedience to godless and lawless authorities is not only contradictory to the teachings of the Scriptures, it is also inherently shameful, immoral and demeaning, and even criminal. Such obedience constitutes a grievous violation of the natural order of good and evil and calls light that which is darkness (Isaiah 5:20). Baptists view the state from a healthy hermeneutic of suspicion. They are wary of the sacralisation of state power, which is what has tended to happen in both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras in Eastern Europe. For anabaptists the 'harmony' between church and state which is regarded by the Orthodox Church as a sacred archetype, is merely a pragmatic political construct and something human, even all too human. In some cases, baptistic believers were more inclined to view the Church-State not as the Kingdom of God, but as the realm of the Antichrist.<sup>22</sup> For post-Soviet baptists today, the archetypes of a 'Holy Russia', and 'Orthodox people' are devoid of their customary magical hold.

Throughout their history, baptists have learned that the alliance of church and state is without biblical justification and is morally bankrupt. Commenting on the anabaptists' suspicions about the state, Franklin H. Littell remarks that

the nation-state [in the twentieth century] has developed into the most acts of totalitarian governments, but also the illegal acts of legitimate governments have become a grievous burden to men and women of conscience.<sup>23</sup>

The recent history of Russia demonstrates that the hegemony of the (Russian) Orthodox Church in post-Soviet society does not lead to spiritual revival, but merely creates a thin veneer of Christianity among a people who live in fear of the all-powerful church-state. Neither Orthodox monarchism

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<sup>21</sup> J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Friedmann, 'The Doctrine of the Two Worlds', in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender*, ed. by Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1957), pp. 105-106.

<sup>23</sup> Franklin H. Littell, 'A Fresh and Radical Break', in *Amish Roots: A Treasury of History, Wisdom and Lore*, ed. by John A. Hostetler (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 15.

nor atheistic communism, along with their prevailing authoritarianism, is compatible with the freedom of the gospel.<sup>24</sup>

Russian history affords numerous examples of the fatal consequences that can ensue when political and religious institutions are united into the totality of a single authority.<sup>25</sup> Under such conditions, Christianity can become conscripted by imperialistic ideologies, resulting in a demonic hybrid of pseudo-Christian dogma and xenophobic nationalism.<sup>26</sup> This kind of fake patriotic religion leads to the blasphemous deification of the state. The church-state under these conditions becomes, as Friedrich Nietzsche might have put it, ‘the coldest of cold monsters’.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, ‘national churches’ can invoke the name of ‘God’ as an idol who has bestowed a special blessing and favour on a particular nation, which then allegedly gives this ‘special’ nation the right to invade and conquer neighbouring territories and subdue their peoples — as can be currently witnessed in Ukraine. Søren Kierkegaard stated that to speak of a ‘Christian state’ makes as much sense as to speak of a ‘square circle’.<sup>28</sup> This fake Christianity will always refuse to accept any higher power and will ruthlessly destroy any forms of genuine Christian faith that go beyond cultural or national identity.

### **A Natural Asymmetry: Church, Civil Society and the State**

The political system of a nation includes both the state and civil society.<sup>29</sup> According to anabaptist ecclesiology, a free church should be part of a free civil society, rather than an appendage or servant of the state. In reality however, the post-Soviet church, especially in Russia, has become in effect, co-ruler with the state.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, baptists hold that the church is directly subordinate only to God. In terms of the responsibility of the church to the state and society, a natural asymmetry can be postulated, which maintains that one’s responsibility towards society (i.e. towards one’s ‘neighbour’ in the broadest sense of Luke 10:25–37) precedes one’s loyalty to the state. Furthermore, the church has a duty of obedience to the state only insofar as the state protects the welfare of one’s neighbours and the general well-being

<sup>24</sup> Searle and Cherenkov, *Future and a Hope*, pp. 126-27.

<sup>25</sup> Vitaliy Petrenko, *Vlast v tserkvy: Razvytye kontseptsyy vlasty v Russkoy pravoslavnoy tserkvy* (Cherkassy: Kollokvyum, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Mark Woods, ‘How the Russian Orthodox Church is backing Vladimir Putin’s new world order’, *Christian Today*, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/how-the-russian-orthodox-church-is-backing-vladimir-putins-new-world-order/81108.htm> [accessed 17 September 2019].

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. by T. Common (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack upon Christendom, 1854–1855*, trans. by W. Lowrie. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Matt Killingsworth, *Civil Society in Communist Eastern Europe: Opposition and Dissent in Totalitarian Regimes* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Searle and Cherenkov, *Future and a Hope*, p. 61.

of the people. If one maintains that the responsibility of the church is primarily to God, then the order of responsibility is as follows: firstly, to God, then to society (the people), and, lastly, to the state. The problem for post-Soviet evangelicals has been the neglect of society. The church has either fawned on the state or has attempted to avoid politics altogether. What is needed is a more nuanced and balanced approach, such as that argued by Nigel G. Wright. This leading British Baptist theologian, commenting on anabaptist approaches to church-state relations, remarks that the early anabaptists ‘recognised the necessity of government while rejecting its violent excesses and its consequent discontinuity with divine or ecclesial action’.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, such judicious approaches have largely been neglected by post-Soviet Baptists. Church relations towards civil society in both the Soviet and the post-Soviet periods have tended to oscillate between hostile opposition and careless indifference. Neither posture has a proper biblical-theological basis and each has contributed towards the lack of a robust and well-informed approach to public issues in the post-Soviet space.<sup>32</sup>

There are recent signs, however, that this neglect of public issues is beginning to be addressed. In Ukraine the Revolution of Dignity has forced post-Soviet evangelicals to address a question they long avoided: in what way is the gospel not only the source of personal salvation, but also the source of social transformation? After the Revolution in 2013/14, both the evangelical and the historical churches have been faced with the unsettling truth that personal faith and evangelism alone are no longer sufficient. Effective gospel witness requires active engagement at the level of the state and civil society. Lina Andronovienė and Parush Parushev put the point well in a 2004 article which made an important contribution to formulating a self-critical social theology for post-Soviet Baptists. They warned that ‘if the church avoids social involvement because it values holiness more than compassion, it is on a straight road to legalism and formalism’.<sup>33</sup>

In light of this new reality, baptists (not only in Ukraine and Russia, but also in the West) need to ask themselves some searching questions: Why is it that evangelical Christians seem to take an unseemly relish in exposing the sins of ordinary people in our churches, but maintain a pusillanimous silence concerning the sins of those in power? Why do they seem to lack the

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<sup>31</sup> Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 231.

<sup>32</sup> These problems are addressed in Mykhailo Cherenkov’s insightful article, ‘Global’noye (post-) sekulyarnoye obshchestvo kak kontekst i predmet missiologii’, in *Novyye Gorizonty Missii*, ed. by P. Penner, Vladimir Ubeyvolk, Ivan Rusin and Ruslan Zagidulin (Cherkassy: Colloquium, 2015), pp. 282–297.

<sup>33</sup> Andronovienė and Parushev, ‘Church, State, and Culture: On the Complexities of Post-Soviet Evangelical Social Involvement’, p. 210.



moral imagination to envision the possibility of living in a country without bribes and without lies? Is it even possible to live a life of obedience to the Way of Christ if the entire structure of society requires them to compromise basic Christian principles of honesty, openness, integrity and compassion? If the state and society are corrupt, should they simply endure it and take no steps to address this social evil? If they lack the moral courage to take upon themselves the legal responsibility for the government and the situation in our country, then why do they wonder at the immorality of society and the nihilism of ordinary people? If the church is not in solidarity with the people, then why should the people be in solidarity with the church?

These questions indicate that for post-Soviet baptists the time for strict distinctions between ‘pure politics’ and ‘pure religion’ has passed; now politics is intertwined with economics, public morality, and religion. To assert that the church prefers to stay out of politics is to admit that the church shies away from public life and is afraid to get involved in the complex issues of our time. Yet commitment to Christ’s Great Commission obliges one to go out into the world and to transform the nations in the power of God’s truth. This means that baptists cannot remain silent on the pressing public issues of the present. Arcane reflection on esoteric ideas and principles will not suffice and narcissistic self-congratulatory nostalgia for the ‘heroic witness’ of persecuted Christians during the Soviet era is a road to nowhere. Baptists must engage with what is taking place now, in the current concerns of the public sphere.<sup>34</sup>

However, the difficulties at the present time to achieve effective dialogue between the state, society and the church in the post-Soviet space must be admitted. The problem lies not solely in the authoritarian nature of post-Soviet states, but also in the fact that post-Soviet society is not ready for freedom and the state assigns to the church a role that is not free. In this environment, churches fight for influence and survival, for proximity to power and concessions from the authorities, and they regard each other not as partners in dialogue, but rather as competitors. That is the short answer to how and why the church, the state, and society in the post-Soviet space have failed to develop a dialogue and mutual respect for the freedom of the other.

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<sup>34</sup> Indeed, there seems to be a trend among a new generation of Russian-speaking baptistic theologians to engage in a nuanced way with the complex issues of church–state relations in the post-Soviet space. For example, Lina Toth (Andronovienè) and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov have offered helpful contributions to these discussions, as already noted in this article.

## **Conclusion: Looking to the Future with Hope**

The response of the church to the Maidan protests in Ukraine signals a seismic shift in the church's public engagement in post-Soviet society.<sup>35</sup> The implications and significance of Maidan extend beyond the national boundaries of Ukraine. Maidan may become a symbol of hope for church and society throughout the nations of the former USSR. Maidan has served as a powerful social impetus for the church's participation in public affairs.

What is needed now are words of love and peace, of hope and the future. What is needed is the intermediation of the church, a participation that is critical and prophetic, but at the same time promotes non-violent resistance to evil, as well as active initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation. The baptist vision of non-violent confrontation and faith in the victory of the lamb of God over all the powers and principalities of the world offers a unique perspective on recent events in the post-Soviet space.

Yet rather than shunning the world and adopting a sectarian posture of withdrawal and retreat, the baptist vision posits a free church and a free state in order to reveal the social potential of the church and the universal, reconciling nature of the gospel. The baptist vision thus provides a unique perspective to explain how peace is attained through sacrifice, through a 'politics of forgiveness'<sup>36</sup> that facilitates love toward one's enemies, and the unity of those at enmity with each other through the reconciling power of Christ. All of this is needed not only for the sake of the state and the society, but also for the church itself as it fashions a responsible and transformative social theology.

**Joshua T. Searle is Director of Postgraduate Studies, Spurgeon's College, London.**

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<sup>35</sup> Oksana Horkusha and Liudmyla Fylypovych, 'Ukrainianian Dignity Revolution as a Civil Church Locus of Action', in *Religion, State, Society and Identity in Transition: Ukraine*, ed. Rob van der Laarse, Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, Vitaliy V. Proshak and Tetiana Mykhalchuk (Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2015), pp. 345-56.

<sup>36</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 222-231.