

Book Reviews

Constantine Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960–1990* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs, 2014), 510 pages. ISBN: 978-1783689903.

This substantial work by Constantine Prokhorov (who completed his PhD at IBTS Prague) is a significant contribution to our understanding of the history of Russian Baptists in the thirty years immediately preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union. These were mainly the years of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, when the post-war Soviet policy of isolation allowed very few meaningful contacts with the West.

Prokhorov's central thesis is that, during this period, Soviet Baptists — despite being clearly 'protestant' in belief and outlook — in some important ways mirrored Russian Orthodox thinking and practice. This was partly because of their shared experience of isolation from the West, and shared suffering and persecution because of their Christian faith. The author is careful to point out that the resulting commonalities did not arise because of any formal agreements between Baptists and the Orthodox. Rather it was the case that some observable features of Soviet Baptist life in this period exhibited similarities in both theology and practice with Orthodoxy.

In the central chapters of the book Prokhorov goes on to explore this idea, first with regard to God and soteriology, where he sees the influence of the Orthodox 'apophatic' tradition, and a link between Orthodox theology and the traditional Arminianism of Russian Baptists. Even the 'sola scriptura' of the Baptists is modified in some ways by the shared traditions and heritage of what it means to be Russian. On the church and sacraments, Prokhorov notes that, during the period under review, Soviet Baptists gave lists of up to seven 'holy ordinances' and that, for instance, in their celebration of the Lord's Supper there was a certain sacramental mysticism that echoed Orthodox practice. Soviet Baptists also paid more attention than would be common among most Baptists to certain aspects of the Orthodox Liturgical year, and Prokhorov argues that in the reverence given to the actual book of the Bible it almost became equivalent to an Orthodox icon.

As in Orthodoxy, Russian Baptist spirituality was firmly based on *sobornost* (community) rather on the typical Protestant individualism; and the strict ordering of the life of believers and church life resembled some Orthodox monastic traditions. At the same time there are many examples of a kind of shared 'folk religion' in terms of popular piety, modes of dress and behaviour in society.

All this went along with some close fraternal relations between Baptist and Orthodox leaders during this period. Something of that has continued beyond 1990, but since then the influence of USA-based evangelicals on Russian Baptists has also meant a certain distancing from some of the ‘commonalities’ between Baptists and Orthodoxy described here.

I found Prokhorov’s thesis compelling, based as it is on a wealth of primary sources, especially the official journals of both the ‘registered’ Baptists (AUCECB) and the breakaway ‘Reform Baptists’ or *Initsiativniki* (CCECB). Notably, he detects the same Orthodox influences on both groups.

Extensive interviews with former Russian Baptist leaders now living in North America bring this story to life in a most interesting way, with some delightful vignettes of Russian Baptist (and Orthodox) life in this period.

Overall, this is a fascinating window on the history of Russian Baptists in a unique and challenging time in their history, and an important study for anyone seeking to understand the traditions that inform the life of present-day Russian Baptists.

Reviewed by Revd Tony Peck — General Secretary, European Baptist Federation.

Konstantin Prokhorov, *In the Siberian Palestines: History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptist Church in Omsk (1890-1941)* [my translation of the original book title in Russian: В СИБИРСКИХ ПАЛЕСТИНАХ - История Омской церкви евангельских христиан-баптистов (1890-е – 1941 г.)] (Omsk, Steinhagen: Samenkorn Publishing, 2019), 928 pages. ISBN: 978-3862032273.

This book is dedicated to recent memorable dates such as the 300th anniversary of the city of Omsk and the 120th anniversary of the founding of the Omsk Evangelical Christians-Baptist church. The project was supported by the Union of Baptist Churches of the Omsk region, as well as by the Research Center of the Euro-Asian Accreditation Association.

The author focuses primarily on the first foundational fifty years of the Omsk church. In thirteen chapters Prokhorov describes the beginnings of the church and some of its activities, while at the same time relating them to the overall historical processes and influences in Eastern Europe and in the region. The church was born and registered in difficult times and flourished in spite of limited freedoms before the 1917 revolution, followed by Soviet