

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON THE EVANGELISTIC
THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY
OF RUSSIAN BAPTISTS**

by

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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 1990's, thousands of Western Protestant missionaries have flooded into the former Soviet Union to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. In many cases these groups have been almost completely ignorant of the nature and history of the Russian Baptists, who comprised the most important evangelical segment of Christianity in this part of the world. Some Westerners have even believed themselves to be the first ones to bring the gospel to the Russian people, ignoring not only over a century of Baptist evangelism in Russia, but 1,000 years of Russian Orthodoxy in this vast country. Even those that have come and worked directly with the Baptists have rarely had much knowledge of their origins and history, and have shown little interest in acquiring this understanding.

The Russian Baptists have a rich and moving history that deserves much more scrutiny by Westerners, and this paper is only a very minor contribution to that cause. I will focus on one particular issue within that overall history – that of Russian Baptist evangelism. Even within this overall topic I will not be able to mention many specific events. Rather, the goal of this paper is to bring together some of the more important aspects of Baptist history that have influenced how they have thought about and carried out evangelism in Russia. There is very little that is published about this topic, and so the material from this paper is derived primarily from interviews with Russian Baptist leaders. Each topic in this paper deserves more research, and hopefully those who would do such research will find in this paper some ideas and directions for their labor.

This paper deals primarily with evangelical evangelism, and is not attempting to summarize the history of Christianity in Russia – an effort which would be dominated by a study of Russian Orthodoxy. Such studies already exist in abundance. I will only briefly mention some important aspects of Orthodoxy that have influenced Baptist evangelism. Then I will provide a basic historical framework within which the Baptists can be better understood. In two further sections I will discuss some of the central historical issues of theology and methodology that have characterized Baptist evangelism. A final section will offer some of the opinions of the Baptists as they reflect on the work of Western Evangelicals in Russia in the 1990's.

I. SUMMARY OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CONTEXT

To understand evangelism by Evangelical Christians within a country dominated by Orthodoxy, one must begin with an understanding of the self-image of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church believes that its forms, sacraments and traditions have continued uninterruptedly from the apostles themselves. When Constantinople and Rome split apart in 1054, the eastern branch of Christendom considered that the West had deviated from the truth, leaving the East to preserve the initial teachings of the undivided church. Orthodoxy then continued in the tradition that had been formerly accepted by all Christians as the common and universal teaching of the church. Long before Western evangelical Christians were seen to be "invading" the Orthodox domain of Russia, the groups that became the Russian Baptists had become the heretical outlaws in the lands dominated by Russian people.

Russian Orthodox churches had spread over Russia through a method that would not be acceptable to most Evangelicals. Large groups were baptized into Orthodoxy without hearing the same gospel that has been preached forcefully since the Reformation – that each individual must

turn from his life of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and in so doing receive eternal forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Orthodox converts were baptized into the beginning of a process of salvation, a process that was understood as available and contained only within the walls of the Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy became the national religion of Russia, virtually unchallenged for the 900 years until the Baptists arrived. Understanding this context is critical to appreciating some of the differences between Baptists in Russia and their counterparts in the West – and especially in free America. The Baptists are a plant that has always grown in a hostile environment, and their subsequent doctrines and practices have been deeply influenced by the Russian Orthodox soil.

II. BAPTIST HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

A. Baptist Origins

The churches that make up the Union of Evangelical Christians – Baptists come from two primary groups that were once independent of each other: The Evangelical Christians and the Baptists. Since the two were combined into one union during Soviet times, and continue in this union today, they will be treated together for the purpose of most of this paper. However, a few comments can be made to distinguish between the two groups in this first section. Thereafter, the term "Baptists" will be used to refer to both groups unless otherwise noted.

In the 1860's the Evangelical Christians began their work in St. Petersburg. They worked primarily among aristocratic groups, and caused quite a stir among the intelligentsia. Many aristocrats opened their homes for meetings of these Evangelicals, who preached the gospel in a way that was refreshing to people who had grown dissatisfied with Orthodox teaching. This movement caught the attention of Orthodox Russia, and as a result some aristocrats were even deported for following the new teachings.

The roots of the Russian Baptist churches can also be traced to the middle 1800's with the arrival of German Mennonites into the Ukraine. This group brought with them a Bible-based gospel ministry, and invited Russian peasants to their simple meetings. Their focus on prayer, preaching, singing, and communion spoke directly to the hearts of the Russian people who had been used to the strict liturgical style of the Russian Orthodox Church. The early people who attended continued to go to Orthodox services as well as the Mennonite meetings. However, the re-baptizing of believers and refusal to use icons, among other critical differences, eventually caused a complete separation from Orthodoxy.

A second point of entry for the Baptists, at the same time as the entrance into Ukraine, was Georgia. The first Baptist church was begun in Tbilisi, and the new faith spread from there north into Russia. In contrast to the Evangelical Christians, the Baptists tended to appeal more to the middle class, and it was mainly within that layer of society that they grew.

B. Early Growth and Spread

From the very beginning the Baptists exhibited a strong missionary zeal. This was especially true in the Ukraine. The Baptists promoted the notion that every Christian is an evangelist and a missionary. In fact, in the early days of the movement there were more missionaries than there were pastors. A common topic of early leadership meetings was the question of how to evangelize the Ukraine and Russia. Missionaries were sent to cities without evangelical churches all over the territories that would become the Soviet Union. It was a high-energy movement.

The primary means of evangelism in those times was not public proclamation, but personal communication from family to family. Curious people would often ask Baptists about

their lives, since they were full of joy and zeal in their newfound faith. They had many opportunities for evangelistic conversations. Village life in those days had a strong communal atmosphere. If important people from a village came to Christ, many others would listen to them. As a result, often a large number of people in a village would come to Christ. This brought about repression from Orthodoxy, a phenomena that would persist up until this very day.

The Baptists spread rapidly over the territory of Russia. The greatest period of growth of the movement was within its first 50 years, up until around the time of the death of Lenin.

C. Baptists During the Soviet Union

After Stalin came into power, heavy repression wiped out much of the gain that the Baptists had accomplished in those early years. A repressive new law in 1929 effectively prevented the Baptists from starting new churches. Thus a great "freeze" began for the Baptists. The structures of the Baptist and Evangelical associations were eliminated, and churches had to cooperate in secret instead of in open congresses. The churches continued to do evangelism, but now it was all done quietly.

There was a period of revival after WWII, much of its effect being felt during the great famine of that time. Baptists started to work more openly again, and the churches started to grow again. The communists were surprised, thinking that they had eliminated this faith, but now it was appearing again. Thus, under Krushchev, there was a new wave of repression with higher levels of control over the churches.

In Soviet times Baptists would lose their jobs for doing any kind of open evangelism. Many of them were also sent to prison, especially the leaders and most active members. People were forbidden by law from visiting Baptist churches, and members themselves were forbidden from visiting churches other than their own. On paper, a national law guaranteed freedom of religion, but this was never the case in reality. KGB representatives would come to churches and record sermons to see if anything was said against the Soviet authorities, and would take note of those that were active in ministry. The charges laid against those sent to prison were often fabricated in order to preserve the illusion to the world that religious freedom existed in the Soviet Union.

Among the general public, Baptists became social pariahs. This had always been the case in Orthodox Russia, which considered all non-Orthodox faiths to be heretical. But additional stigma was laid on the Baptists due to the heavy propaganda published against them in Soviet times. The Soviet government used to show movies slandering the Baptists, even accusing them of such things as sacrificing their children.

D. The Union of Baptists and Evangelical Christians

The situation in Russia had become more repressive, as noted above, and the Soviet authorities constantly desired more control over the churches. As a result, a union of the aforementioned Evangelical Christians and Baptists was formed in 1944. Beyond the official need to do so, the evangelical leaders decided for themselves that such a union would be necessary for them in spite of the differences they had in church practices.

The main differences between these two groups surrounded the question of who should be ordained as a minister. Evangelical Christians believed that any brother could be ordained. The other brothers would pray over him, and he would become an ordained minister. Baptists, on the other hand, believed that only other ordained ministers could select those who could be ordained. Since only ordained pastors could perform baptisms and communion, this was no small issue.

After the formation of the union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, a new set of beliefs, teachings, and policies were agreed upon that are now accepted by all churches. For many issues, the local church itself has had a great deal of autonomy. Regarding issues of evangelism, which are the focus of this paper, there are no surviving differences that would be discerned between the original two groups in the union.

E. The Schism over Registration

Perhaps the most important event that has affected the Baptists was the 1961 schism over the issue of registration. The most important differences among Baptist churches today stem from this division.

Under Soviet restrictions, all churches were required to register with the government. Prior to 1960, these registered churches had nonetheless operated with some small measure of autonomy. There were also some churches that began as unregistered churches, and these had been under great pressure from the very beginning.

But in 1960 a special law was passed, the intention of which was to try to set the church against itself. The Council of Religious Affairs in every region was placed in control over all the churches. On paper this body was to be a mediator between the churches and the government, but in actuality it worked closely with the KGB to repress churches. It was in fact an unofficial department of the KGB. Through this Council, government informants were placed in every church.

The decree began with a letter that was sent to Baptist leaders. This letter made note that the church had continued to grow over the prior years, and that this was not a good situation for a country that was building communism. Thus more strict limitations were needed. Every senior presbyter received this letter. They were forced to decide to either follow all these new rules or else go to prison. The new rules would, in effect, make evangelism a criminal offense. The letter was then sent to every church in the Baptist Union. It was this letter that served as the knife that caused the division.

In response to the letter, two factions formed. One of them decided to accept this compromise in order to save the union. Another faction felt that it would be a sin to accept such a compromise, and asked for a congress of all pastors to get together. The request of the second group was denied. They then decided to split off from the others who were willing to compromise. Beginning in 1961, the "registered" and the "unregistered" Baptists were two separate groups. In most areas the majority became registered, but there were a few exceptions.

Starting with this split, the two Baptist factions grew apart from each other in many ways. In addition, there was a great deal of distrust and animosity between them that survives into the present day. The unregistered Baptists became very cloistered and conservative, and were much more heavily persecuted by the Soviet government. The registered churches were forced to accept restrictions that hindered their evangelistic work, but were able to keep their buildings and some semblance of their orderly church life.

F. Baptists After Perestroika

The registered and unregistered Baptists continued as the primary Baptist groups for most of the rest of the Soviet period. However, as the Soviet Union drew to a close, a new group of independent Baptists began to emerge. This third group didn't like the government control of the registered churches, on the one hand, or the extremism of the unregistered churches, on the other hand. This new group wanted to have their own churches outside of the union. Perestroika began before they had a chance to form their own union, but many of these new churches sprang up and became more flexible to do things in new ways.

There was also a growing youth movement in the registered churches near the end of the Soviet period. They were often unhappy with the leadership of the registered churches, and also greatly disliked government doing evangelism in new control. They had become more active, putting on Christian youth camps and ways.

It was these two groups that first understood the evangelistic possibilities arising under Perestroika. The independent Baptists and those in the youth movement had started to be active in Soviet times, but now became very active in the 1990's. They started new missions, made Western contacts, and did public evangelism. As the 20th century draws to a close, many of the new churches that resulted from these two movements are forming themselves into various unions, one of which is called the Association of Evangelical Christian Churches. The registration issue has been complicated by a new law that has placed some restrictions on registration, so the final outcome of unions and registrations is yet to be seen.

Under Perestroika, the unregistered churches remained largely as they were in Soviet times. They continue to be very conservative and legalistic, and vow that they will never register, even though the governmental situation that caused the original split of Baptists has completely changed. Many thus consider that these independent churches are losing their ability to make an impact on the country, and are losing moral authority among other evangelicals.

The registered churches occupy a middle ground between the new independent Baptist churches and the unregistered churches. They have some flexibility, but are not adapting to the new reality as well as the independent churches. In addition, some of them have lost members, and many think that this is a result of too much attention to building projects that became possible with Western funds that poured in after Perestroika.

III. EVANGELISTIC THEOLOGY

Russian Baptists have never had a written, formal theology. Most of their attention during their history has had to be focused on simply keeping the church alive. Baptist Pastors had no formal training, since for most of the Soviet period there were no seminaries available to them. Thus, to speak of an evangelistic theology is to refer to an informal set of principles that were held in common, largely through oral tradition. However, this was more than a loose collection of ideas. Some limited publications and correspondence courses were available to leaders, and these were passed on to other churches. Therefore, although the input was limited, the result of cooperation was that a high degree of uniformity could be seen among the churches in their teachings regarding the theological topics of this paper. In this section I will often use the past tense as I describe teachings that were more solidly agreed upon prior to Perestroika. Some of this theology is being questioned today, a point that I will make several times below. Quotations found in the text are those of the Baptist leaders that I interviewed.

A. The Nature of Conversion

Like all evangelicals, Russian Baptists teach that a person must experience a new birth by the Spirit of God. However, the door to that new birth is consistently expressed by the word "repentance." Some have noted that Russians emphasize repentance from sin, while Americans emphasize faith in the work of Christ. This is, of course, not to say that faith in Christ is left untaught by Russian Baptists. However, their emphasis in explaining conversion is on the point of admitting one is a sinner, confessing that sin and asking for forgiveness, with the intent on turning away from sin. The changed life of the believer is the central focus of conversion, and without such transformation the Baptists would not believe that new spiritual life is present in a person.

The Baptists see many people in Russia who are "believers" in the sense that they accept the existence of God and the work of Christ. A thin veneer of this kind of belief lays over all of the former Soviet Union. Even men in prisons will say to them, "Look, we are believers," as they show that they are all wearing crosses. As one pastor said, "they wear a cross but live Satan's life." By some shallow definitions of "belief," the vast majority of Russian people are already "believers." The Baptists see as one of their primary evangelical tasks to rid people of this delusion.

That which is commonly considered "faith" among the Russian public is just a step along the way to true conversion, at which point the life of a person is transformed from his former sinful life to a new life of following Christ. To be "born again" is to first repent from sin and then believe in Christ. Perhaps both elements are present from the beginning in the Baptist teaching, but the emphasis on the repentance side of conversion is very strong, deeply influencing how the gospel is communicated.

B. Evidence of Conversion

The existence of new life, as a result of true repentance, is confirmed by the fruit that will be evident in the new believer's life. It is recognized that the new believer does not change all at once, but it is expected that his way of thinking will have changed right from the beginning. Whereas before he was a slave of sin, and couldn't see any way out, now he has a new joy in finding release from that slavery, and actively desires to put away sin.

Since baptism is delayed after repentance (see below), the life of the new convert is examined for evidence of new life. He will be immediately congratulated for his repentance, but certainty about his salvation will not be expressed. The church would expect to see joy, a sense of forgiveness, the ceasing of former sins (which may include quite a list – see under legalism below), and regular attendance at church. He should be praying, reading his Bible, and giving evidence of change to which his friends and family can attest. Good works are expected to result from faith, because faith without works is dead. But in all of this there is no assertion that one can earn salvation by any merit of his own.

One important emphasis from the notes above is that the church service was always the central issue of Baptist ministry. Some influence from Russian Orthodoxy can be seen in this strong emphasis. Without the church service there is no church life, and a believer must participate in this critical basis of church life. A true believer would be expected to make church services central in his life, and make whatever sacrifices would be necessary to be at church. In some churches, this meant one should be at the church for every single meeting.

Under communism, the pressures of persecution caused Baptists to become more secretive and cloistered, and believers were called to a more strict separation from the world. The new believer would be expected to join in this separation, and the result was that Baptists became more and more ingrown as time went on. One evidence of conversion would be a readiness to identify with the kind of separation called for by the church.

C. Legalism

External issues, especially in such matters as conservative clothing, tended to become strong rules within Baptist churches. However a conviction began, it eventually had taken the force of church law. Even young women who visited Baptist churches would be rebuked if they were wearing earrings or makeup. Prohibitions against smoking, drinking (even in moderation) and dancing of any sort became central to Baptist spirituality. A person would not be baptized if he or she were known to be continuing in any of the list of prohibited practices. Seekers would

soon discover that to become a believer (at least with the Baptists) would mean doing away with all these practices in his or her life.

There were some regional differences in the strength of legalism among Baptists, and after the schism over registration the unregistered Baptists tended to be more legalistic than the registered Baptists. In some unregistered churches it was even considered a sin for a man to wear a necktie. Areas that many in the West would consider "gray" were starkly black and white for the Russian Baptists.

The time since Perestroika has brought about many changes among various Baptist churches in Russia. Although some remain as legalistic as they ever were (especially many of the unregistered churches), contact with the West has had a liberalizing effect on many other churches. Young people have especially questioned the importance of having strict rules on external issues, and have tended to gravitate toward the newer churches that do not have such strict dogmas about dress and lifestyle. But even in these churches, attitudes toward external issues will tend to be on the conservative side in the estimation of most Western observers.

D. Conversion and Baptism

Water baptism, as practiced by Russian Baptists, came closer to the idea of Lutheran "confirmation" than it did to common Western Baptist ideas of baptism as a first step of obedience. Baptism was never performed immediately (or even relatively soon) after repentance. It was preceded by a time of learning, in which the pastor would be able to obtain proof that the person who had repented was living an obedient life. The time of delay would vary by churches, but some of the more conservative churches would delay baptism for a year or more.

People who had repented were often put in care of people to watch over them and their new spiritual life. Later there were some special courses in preparation for baptism, but many informal personal conversations were the usual means of discipleship. Informal teaching was the rule, because there were no printed materials to teach from. The most important teaching for the candidate was gained by coming to church and hearing sermons.

Leading up to baptism, the pastor would confirm that the candidate was truly ready, and was not confusing Orthodox ideas in his faith. More careful confirmation was needed if the person was from an unbelieving family. As mentioned above, there was often pressure to be at every service of the church in order to show that one was truly faithful.

In many churches a traditional question was posed to baptismal candidates: "Will you be saved if you are not baptized?" The answer was expected to be "yes," and they were to be able to confirm this fact from the Bible – usually by reference to the case of the thief on the cross. They considered this important due to the Russian Orthodox teaching of baptismal regeneration that would have a large influence on the thinking of Russian people. Another question would be "Are you sure of your salvation?" Here the issue was assurance, not security (see below). In other words, the candidate was expected to show clear evidence of salvation before he or she could be baptized. In most churches baptism was not a part of salvation, but an important step of obedience. One was saved without it, but of course it was a sign of one's salvation.

Only after baptism could one be a church member and take communion. Once the person was baptized, a greater personal responsibility before God would be placed on him. He would be told that the meaning of baptism is a promise to God to serve Him with a good conscience.

Newer churches since the time of Perestroika have been more flexible to allow for more rapid baptism if new life seems evident in a person who has repented. They are more likely to see baptism as a command of Christ that should be fulfilled as soon as reasonable. It makes less sense to them to prevent those who have been born again from fulfilling this command until

after a long period of teaching. It confuses conversion with maturity, and makes baptism too much like a "graduation" when it should be an "inauguration."

E. Conversion and Communion

As mentioned above, a believer could only take communion after he had been baptized. This illustrates the great importance placed on baptism as a form of confirmation of faith. Communion could only be for confirmed believers, and the church declared this confirmation through baptism. Often a special communion service would be performed for newly baptized people – and this could even be right on the riverbank.

But withholding communion also speaks of a high importance placed on the Lord's Supper among Baptists. Communion has had much more tradition associated with it among Russians than among most Westerners. It is considered more "holy," and there were many rules associated with it. This usually included special instructions for how the bread was to be prepared, how it was to be broken and who could break it, the fact that only wine and not juice was to be used, and other instructions. Again this displays some influence of Orthodox ritualism on the Russian Baptists

Being allowed to take communion was not taken for granted among Baptists. It was the sign that a member was maintaining a normal spiritual level. Those in the midst of spiritual problems would voluntarily not take communion during that time. In addition, those under discipline by the church would be refused communion. An additional restriction would be found among unregistered churches, where only those within that union were allowed to take communion. Visitors from registered churches and Pentecostals would not be allowed to partake. The pastor would invite to communion "only people who remain in one spirit with our union." That is to say, only those who believed as they did about registration.

The importance of communion was also seen in its place on the monthly Baptist calendar. Communion service was the culmination of the month of church services. On the last Sunday of the month the pastor would ask all the members to prepare themselves to receive communion on the following Sunday. These communion services were longer than regular services. The atmosphere was usually a heavy one, and often with much weeping. Older pastors especially stressed the sadness of the occasion, in remembrance of the death of Christ. This again reflected an Orthodox influence. It was never a joyful occasion. Music in the minor key was used during communion. This emotional atmosphere was then often used for a call to repentance. This is a telling feature of Baptist evangelism, in that the time of sorrow over sin, as opposed to a time of joy over the good news of forgiveness, was considered the most important element in bringing one to repentance.

F. Assurance and Security

Russian Baptists made a clear distinction between assurance of salvation and security of salvation. As Evangelicals, they taught that a person is saved and forgiven now, can be sure of his salvation, and is not in the process of being saved (as is taught in Orthodoxy). It is this very assurance that became the basis for a candidate to be allowed baptism. Without such assurance, there is no true faith.

However, security of salvation is an entirely different matter. Russian Baptists are, at least informally, Arminian in their theology. They tend to place more emphasis on the free will of an individual, both in coming to repentance and in keeping faithful to God. Thus the Baptists clearly taught that a person could lose his salvation. The answer to just how that salvation could be lost could differ among pastors. Some of the more legalistic ones were known to use the fear of losing salvation as a prod to compel members to be at church services, creating a de facto

performance orientation toward salvation. Perhaps the more common view was that only a person who deliberately walked away from God and declared that he was no longer following Christ could lose his salvation.

The rejection of the doctrine of "eternal security" continues among the vast majority of Baptists. Calvinist teaching is widely considered to be not only wrong, but also dangerous, since it is seen to lead to loose spiritual lives. In general, the teaching is challenged mainly by means of gathering "proof texts" as opposed to constructing a systematic theology. Most leaders believe that they are teaching the simple message of the Bible, and do not consider themselves to be aligned with "Arminianism" or any other system.

The influence of Western teaching has been felt among Baptists regarding this issue. Many of the young people who have been trained by Western teachers have begun to question the stance of the Baptists or reject it altogether in favor of various Calvinistic positions. Some newer churches have been formed specifically to be founded on this theological basis, which they consider to be more "grace oriented." The issue will continue to be a contentious one for some time, especially as Western teachers bring Calvinist positions into their theological training that is often given to future Baptist preachers.

G. Restoration of the Fallen

With the belief that one can lose his salvation, the situation would arise in which a person who had fallen away would want to come back into fellowship. In such cases with the Russian Baptists, that person would be expected to repent again. In some churches full restoration (here possibly following the Orthodox pattern) was granted only after the fulfillment of one or more punishments. These might include excommunication for a time, exclusion from membership meetings or church services, or shunning by other members (not given a greeting in Jesus' name and not given a "holy kiss" at a service). After this punitive period, at a membership meeting, the repentant person would be brought back into full restoration and communion again.

Other churches without formal punishments would simply accept the new repentance of the returning person, but would watch their life carefully to see that their repentance was genuine. As with initial conversion, a changed life is the evidence of true repentance. A person would not be baptized again, however, since this is a one-time event.

H. Continual Repentance

In addition to initial repentance at the time of conversion, there was a form of ongoing repentance that was often expected of those who had fallen into any kind of sin. This was commonly evidenced by prayers of repentance that are offered in public after sermons. Here again was seen an Orthodox influence, in the presence of extreme guilt feelings and repeated public repentance. Older women would commonly repent in this way, with loud and tearful prayers.

At the end of some services, after an opportunity was given for first time repentance, the pastor could give the members a chance to come forward for a prayer of renewal. Again, many of the older sisters were known to come forward again and again. At times a person would have previously confessed his or her sin to the pastor, and the pastor would tell that person to also confess this sin publicly in church.

There were some churches that taught that since people still sin, they should come forward every week and confess these sins. These were usually only the more extreme examples of this practice, since many Baptists felt there was a great danger of falling into a "spiritual striptease" in which private sins are paraded in front of everybody. They considered this to be damaging, because some sins are better left unknown to the church in order to avoid ruining people's moral

and personal attitudes toward that person. Usually only sins that were public, affecting everyone, would be publicly confessed.

I. Evangelism of Children

As with most Baptists everywhere, Russian Baptist families were taught to lead their children to Christ. The common saying was, "every father a pastor, every mother a deacon, and every family a little church." However, the practice of evangelizing children varied between registered and unregistered churches due to the nature of Soviet restrictions.

Under the more restrictive laws after 1960, registered churches were not allowed to have Sunday schools, and no new young people were allowed to come to church. At some times it was even against the law for a young person to be in a service. Under these conditions, the registered churches became weak on teaching youth. As a result, a large percentage of two generations was lost. Parents who did not teach their children at home still expected them to grow up and then come to Christ, but many of them gave in to outside pressures and didn't stay in the churches.

The unregistered churches, on the other hand, were very active in teaching children. They said, "a church without a Sunday school is a dead church," and vehemently opposed these legal restrictions. They sought to lead all children to Christ. It was an exception if the children were not in the underground church meetings. Usually they all came. As a result, those who taught these children often spent time in prison. The fact that the unregistered churches survived until today is in part credited to those brothers and sisters who fearlessly communicated the gospel to the next generation.

In all churches, usually young people were baptized around 18 years of age. There were some exceptions made for younger ones from 15-17 years old, but none younger than that would be baptized. Children younger than this were not expected to understand the meaning of repentance fully enough to be considered converted. However, all children were continually aimed toward this point of repentance, which was the point of entry into their spiritual life. Prior to repentance they were involved in church (much less so in registered churches, as noted above), but would not be considered members.

J. Evangelism and Orthodoxy

Russia has long been considered by the vast majority of its people to be an Orthodox nation. Even under communism this was the unspoken assumption. From the very beginning of their existence, the Baptists have had to answer their critics in Russia, who never considered them to be legitimate. Baptist evangelism has never escaped (nor is it likely in the near future to escape) the overriding issue of the relation of Baptists to the Orthodox Church.

The early Baptists all came from Orthodox people who were not satisfied with Orthodox teaching and church life. Very early on they began to be persecuted, and soon a mutual animosity developed between the two confessions. Orthodoxy taught that Baptists were heretics, and the same charge was leveled back at them by the Baptists. The Baptist preachers preached against the Orthodox icons, candles, and unbiblical doctrines and practices. Soon Orthodox baptism was not accepted by Baptists as a valid baptism, since the Orthodox Church was considered to be a dead church. Many early Baptists demonstrated their break from Orthodoxy by destroying their icons.

The Baptist apologetic against Orthodoxy was not formally developed, since, as mentioned above, Baptists did not have their own formal theology. They did not take the time to study Orthodox theology, either, and so did not always know much about it. Although Orthodoxy had been in Russia for 1,000 years, it was considered to be dead and thus not worthy of examination. However, Baptists did clearly understand that salvation in Orthodoxy was

"formal," that is – through baptism, and their evangelistic messages were certain to bring out the contrast of formalism versus living faith in Jesus Christ. People were often called to come out of Orthodoxy, since its members had no relationship with Jesus Christ – they just had rituals.

For other Baptists it was a difficult question whether or not Orthodox believers were truly Christians and saved. There were various opinions on the matter. But even with these, the preaching about Orthodoxy was not sympathetic. The Orthodox intolerant persecution against the Baptists, as opposed to any inquiries into Orthodox theology, was more the immediate cause of the apologetic against Orthodoxy.

Baptists were often challenged to answer the questions of those influenced by Orthodoxy. They would ask, "Why don't you have icons, crosses, and other things that Orthodoxy has?" At these times the Baptists took a simple biblical stance, letting such questioners know that Baptists were not forcing people to accept them, but were rather simply saying what God has said about such things in the Bible. The inquirers were told to respond to the Bible and decide for themselves which way was right. Often those who asked such questions pretended to know a lot about Orthodoxy, but in fact they knew very little, instead living by the rationale: "We Russians were born in this faith, and we will die in it." The Baptist would answer, "You were not born in faith, but in sins, and in order to become a believer one has to personally come to God. Faith is not something you can hand down to your children. Each person must decide for himself."

Throughout the history of Baptist evangelism, and continuing to this very day, Orthodox believers have always been difficult for Baptists to talk with. "They live by their ancient traditions, and it is hard to prove to them anything that opposes these traditions."

IV. EVANGELISTIC METHODOLOGY

A. Methodology Under Restrictions

As mentioned earlier, the initial Baptist movement in Russia was extremely active, with a missionary zeal. Much work was done in the open, and person to person evangelism was not hindered. This openness was discontinued as the restrictions and persecutions under Stalin were begun. From that time on, the Baptists were not able to do any evangelistic work in public. As a result, heavy stress began to be placed on the work inside the church building. Members were taught and urged to invite people to church, and this was the main remaining way that they were able to fulfill their "every member an evangelist" belief. Special visiting evangelists would commonly make public calls for people to repent. It was a time of celebration for the church when any soul would come to Christ.

Evangelistic sermons became a standard part of most Baptist services. Baptist worship services contain at least three different sermons, so members could be fed with other messages in spite of this focus on evangelism. In smaller churches, where everybody knew each other, the pastor would look to see whether there might be even one or two unbelievers present at any given service. If so, an evangelistic sermon with a strong invitation would be one of the sermons that day. The evangelistic sermon became one of the most important means of evangelism for Baptists, and the church building itself (among registered Baptists) became the primary location of evangelistic activity.

It is also important to note that the Baptists were never allowed to have Bible schools or seminaries. Almost all pastoral training was informal, and there was no specific evangelism training. Those who preached the gospel mainly just read their Bibles and did what they believed was good and right. There was very limited evangelistic planning and strategy. Spiritual power and faith were the simple bases of evangelistic methodology. As a rule, pastors were not well

educated. In the Soviet Union, when it was discovered that someone was a believer, he became something of a low-class citizen and was not allowed to receive higher education. This form of persecution kept the Baptists largely separated from educated society, limiting their ability to reach that segment with the gospel.

During this same time, all Christian publications were forbidden. However, some were published illegally. Bibles were scarce. When someone was given a New Testament for his birthday or some other occasion, he was overwhelmed with happiness. The lack of literature had some slightly ironic effects on the believers. On the one hand, people had a very limited supply of study aids. On the other hand, the preciousness of what they did have made it certain that it was carefully read.

B. Methodology With Freedom

1. New Problems in Free Russia

a. Inertia – The first note to make about Baptist evangelism is that many have not successfully made the transition to the new freedoms. Under Soviet restrictions, it was generally accepted that one could not be open about one's faith. But now that this is no longer true, many pastors find that their people are stuck in the past, unable to break out of this long-enforced mold. One pastor lamented, "Today people can say whatever they want to anyone, but the problem is that those who should do this are keeping silent." Another pastor said, "Back when it was forbidden to preach, most believers complained about these restrictions. But then when freedom came, some people quit preaching." And so, ironically, the new freedoms have negatively affected some people.

b. Preoccupations – Living standards in the time of the Soviet Union, though poor, were more stable for most people than they are today. People at least felt a sense of economic security - it was easier for them to simply survive. Since work did not preoccupy people in those days, they had time to get together in their homes, often under the disguise of a birthday party or some other celebration, and could then preach the gospel at the event. The new economic situation has caused many to be preoccupied with making a living, or just surviving, and there is generally less time available for socializing.

c. Limited Facilities – Apart from the churches that were in existence before the fall of the Soviet Union, relatively few Baptist churches have their own buildings (especially in the cities where many new churches were formed after Perestroika). For Russians it is considered very important that a church has its own building. Only then will the members (and more importantly the general public) think of it as a "real" church. Many of the new churches are meeting in schools and movie theaters. Most Russians have a hard time being serious about a group that does not meet in a recognizable church building, and this has had some negative effects on church evangelism after Perestroika. In addition, when people are invited to movie theaters, they often identify these as locations where cults do their work, and this prejudices them against the new church group from the very beginning. Churches can't afford to rent the facilities during the week, so the number of meetings that they can have, for various purposes, is also limited. Western visitors during the 1990's heard constant, repeated messages from Russian Baptists about their need for facilities. Many Westerners have thought that this should not be the central issue of a church's work, but the Russian believers are continuing to stress the importance of having their own buildings.

2. New Methods in Free Russia

a. Joint Projects – Beginning with the widely advertised Billy Graham campaigns at the beginning of the 1990's, Russian Baptists worked with a number of Western evangelistic

organizations to put on various kinds of evangelistic campaigns. The atmosphere in the early part of the decade was ripe for such meetings, and many thousands of Russians came to hear evangelistic preaching. At least three factors have combined to decrease the use of such methods over the last half of the decade. First, the initial curiosity of Russians toward foreign visitors has passed away. Early campaigns by almost any American group could draw full houses. Today there is not enough curiosity remaining to draw substantial crowds (except perhaps in cities far from Moscow where very little prior work has been done). The second factor is that the joint projects proved to be extremely ineffective at bringing people into the churches. Many thousands were reportedly converted in these meetings, but a miniscule fraction of them ended up in Baptist churches. The third factor is the waning interest by Americans in continuing this work in Russia. The initial excitement of Americans has died down, and also many have become wise to the fact that their labors have not been fruitful, in spite of the appearance. Joint projects continue, but on a greatly reduced scale.

b. Public and Private Methods – The Baptists have not been very active in putting on evangelistic events on their own, partially due to their distrust of the methods, and partially due to the difficulty of gathering enough volunteers to successfully mount such an effort. The methods that are used vary greatly among churches. Some churches, as mentioned above, are stuck in inertia and are doing almost no evangelism apart from that which is done inside the church during a worship service. Others have had some special meetings, but even those have often been hindered by the widespread public distrust and ignorance of the Baptists. Some of the newer and most flexible churches, with young people less affected by Soviet inertia, are continuing to look for ways that would be the most effective in the Russian context. They have been allowed to visit hospitals, orphanages and prisons to share the gospel, and many have taken advantage of this opportunity (which is often threatened today by Orthodox pressure on the institutions to allow only Orthodox believers to do this work). Pastors report that the most common way that new people are brought into the church is through acquaintances. This is consistent with many comments and reports from Russians that personal relationships are absolutely essential if a Russian is to seriously respond to the gospel.

c. Literature – As mentioned above, Christian literature was scarce but treasured during Soviet times. Today the situation has almost reversed itself. There is so much Russian literature available now that people are even showing contempt for it. In addition, Westerners so flooded the market with free Christian literature that many don't believe that they should have to pay for Christian books. This has damaged attempts by Russians to start their own publishing efforts. And thus the new irony – Christian literature is more available today than at any time in the history of Evangelicals in Russia, yet most of it goes unread. Part of this problem can also be traced to the fact that so many of these books are simple (and sometimes poor) Russian translations of Western books. Such books often fail to speak effectively to the Russian context, and Russians have grown tired of them.

C. Selected Baptist Distinctives in Methodology

Russian Baptists generally follow the methods of evangelism that other evangelical Christians use all over the world. Most of the distinctives that would set them apart from groups of other evangelicals can be inferred from their evangelistic theology, as explained above. Here I will just mention (with some repetition of comments made above) a few issues of historic Russian Baptist methodology that are most commonly considered distinctive by Westerners observing these practices.

1. Public Repentance in the Church Building

Russian Baptist churches (especially, after 1961, the registered churches which had buildings), were influenced by Russian Orthodox thinking to see the building as the "house of God," and would even be heard to say "this is our temple." The pastor might stress to the members that the building was a "holy place." This might especially be true of the area directly in front of the pulpit, where people would come forward to repent. Children were instructed not to play there, even when the church was empty.

The "holiness" of the church building became an important component in the common expectation by Baptists that a person should repent before the church body. Usually, if a person had come to Christ alone, he would be expected to repeat this repentance in church, or at least come forward to confirm the repentance in the presence of witnesses.

A few other factors contributed to this practice beyond the belief in the importance of the church building. Some have cited a Russian lack of trust in individuals, and a desire to have more control over members. Part of the Russian communal nature also shows here, in the need for a person to be in the open with everyone in the collective. A person should not be afraid to pray a prayer of repentance in front of everybody – something that in the West would be very rare.

Today many pastors are less constricted by this thinking. Less and less pastors, and especially among the younger men, believe that a person should repent only in church, following the more commonly Western notion that they should repent where the Holy Spirit urges them to repent. If such a person is expected to wait to go to church, he may not repent at all.

2. Separation versus Integration

Perhaps primarily influenced by their long history of being repressed and persecuted, Russian Baptists have tended to preach a strict separation from the world. Some have called this attitude a "fortress mentality," in which the emphasis is placed on the contrast between the church and the world; even deepening those contrasts by church laws and practices so that the distance between the believer and unbeliever is maximized. This, by the way, contributes to the first issue above, in that for many the only acceptable way to do evangelism would be for the world to come to the church – the church should not go to the world. Pastors would be more likely to emphasize biblical teachings on separations (ex: "friendship of the world is enmity with God... Whoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." - James 4:4) than those on integration (ex: "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world." – I Cor. 5:10-11).

One practical matter that illustrates the problem of separation is the use of the word "Baptist" in church names. Because of the efforts against the Baptists by both the Orthodox Church and the Soviet government, in which the Baptist name was publicly slandered, most Russians are vaguely afraid of involvement with Baptists. They are seen as a fringe group that is not a part of normal society. (Here, of course, the Baptist practice of strict separatism contributed to this image.) Today some of the newer Baptist churches are taking the word "Baptist" out of their name in an attempt to present themselves to the world as just a normal Christian church, not Orthodox, but nothing to be afraid of. After all, the word "Baptist" is not of Russian origin, and sounds strange to the Russian ear in the first place. On the other side are those who feel that this would be a betrayal of those who had labored and died to preserve the Baptist faith in Russia. For some an attitude of hardness against the world seems to be a permanent feature, and will

hinder any attempts to cause those churches to be more accommodating to the world in the process of evangelism.

3. The Nature of the Call

Beyond the emphasis on "repentance," as explained above, Russian Baptists generally had fewer qualms than their Western counterparts about using strong pressure to bring a person to repentance. The preacher would explain to people that they could be saved now, and then he would make a strong call for them to repent right now and in this place. "You could die if you put this off for another day!" A common text used in such situations would be II Cor. 6:2: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." And beyond this, if an unbeliever in a meeting was known by the preacher, even his name might be called from the pulpit: "Sergei, wouldn't you like to repent today?" Some have seen evidence here of the Baptist's Arminian theology in the special emphasis that you must repent, and that it is acceptable to pressure you to come to this point.

Along with those who were brought to repentance in this manner, others were reportedly hindered by the practice. Some people would make an emotional response and later recant the decision. The method of singling out people from the pulpit caused some people to fear that their name might be called from the pulpit next, and as a result were frightened away from church.

The notion of a person being called to "receive Christ" or "accept Christ," commonly used in the West, was not preached among Russian Baptists. Many of them only heard this phrase used in an evangelistic context when Westerners came to Russia after Perestroika.

4. Follow-up

One hindrance to Baptist evangelism, and especially to that which is connected with Western-style campaigns, is the issue of evangelistic follow-up. Many Western groups have come and carried out campaigns in which a large number of people had reportedly come to Christ. In these cases, a list of names and addresses would be given to the Baptist churches to follow-up. In a great majority of the cases, however, very little follow-up, at least of the kind expected by the Westerners, would be performed. In some cases nothing would be done at all, with the reasoning that "they know where our church is, if they want to come." In other cases the only thing that was done was to call the people and invite them to church. House to house visiting was simply not a method that the post-Perestroika Baptists (unlike their ancestors in the 1800's) were prepared to do.

Some leaders have said that they simply did not have enough people in their churches who knew what to do in such situations. The leaders were already overworked, and nobody else was trained well enough to do such visitation. The more traditional Baptist churches have not had very many ministries that were entrusted to common members, apart from being members of the choir. In cases where this has continued to this day, a form of "clergy/laity" distinction has caused a situation in which people "in the pews" are not expected to do very much in the church.

The newer churches have begun to work against this tendency, and are getting training for all their members who want it. In these churches there are a number of people who are capable of doing follow-up work, and mature people of every age group are expected to work with inquirers or new believers from the beginning. Such churches are in a far better position to grow as a result of evangelistic work than are the more traditional ones.

D. Working With New Russian Youth

A special issue of evangelism causing problems for Baptist churches is the difficulty of reaching the youngest generation of Russians. This is a generation unlike any of the older ones

that remember life in Soviet times, and most of the churches are unprepared to alter their approaches in order to reach them. Indeed, most of the churches would reject such methods as being worldly.

For example, the young people tend to be very apathetic about spiritual things. It is common for them to live by the rationale that they are going to live the way they want, while they are young, and then when they get old they will go to church. They are not usually ready to hear a general message about sin and salvation. They might be more open to a message contextualized to their situation, speaking very specifically to their needs as they see them, but many Baptists would consider this to be an alteration of the truth and thus unacceptable. In addition, young people are much more attracted to Western music styles. Some Western-planted churches attract them by using Christian popular music, but many Baptists don't believe that this approach leads the young people to true repentance. "They simply attend church as if it were a club." Inflexibility in methodology may prove to be fatal to Baptist churches that believe that traditional forms are an inextricable part of their message.

Here again, then, the younger and more flexible Baptist churches are going to be in the best position to reach young people for Christ. This fact is already evident in the ages represented by churches. The traditional churches are getting older and are not reaching so many young people. In many of these Baptist churches over half of the members (and sometimes a much higher percentage) are older women. In Moscow, where there are many choices among Baptist churches of various kinds, it is the more flexible ones in which one will find a higher proportion of young people. These churches are active with new kinds of programs to attract youth, seeking to befriend them (and in the process learning where their own appearance needs to be altered in order to avoid driving youth away unnecessarily) and lead them to Christ in more contextualized ways.

V. BAPTIST PERSPECTIVES ON WESTERN EVANGELISM

A great deal of understanding of Russian Baptists can be gleaned from their statements about themselves and their history – this has been the subject of this paper to this point. It is also illuminating to see how the Baptists look at others, and particularly other evangelical Christians. These perspectives lend substance to theological and methodological convictions held by Baptists within their own Russian context, and are thus valuable for a Westerner to contemplate. Such perspectives will be the subject of the rest of this paper.

A. Factors Appreciated

1. Theological

One of the most telling factors among the Baptists' perspectives is the scarcity of praise for Western theological contributions to the Russian scene. Even though, as mentioned earlier, Russian Baptists have never had a systematized theology, traditional understanding of theological issues was held with deep conviction. They were not waiting for Westerners to come to Russia and "set them straight" about proper soteriology. This is especially true for the older generation, since the younger men in Western schools have often been willing to receive new understanding of theological issues. But, since the older men control most of the Baptist churches, Western theology has not made many inroads into Russian Baptist thinking.

2. Methodological

a. Organization – The optimistic attitudes of Westerners, along with the efficient ways that they organized evangelistic events, was respected by Baptists from the very beginning. In many cases this helped the Russians, who had become pessimistic due to the many years of

blockades against them, to become more alert to the new possibilities open to them for doing public evangelism. Public events require administrative skills that most of the Baptists lacked, and so they were taught and encouraged by the Westerners' experience in pulling together all the factors to make an event successful.

b. Public Proclamation - Since the Baptists did not have much history of public evangelism (and absolutely none for many years) the first visitors from the West brought them much encouragement. The Baptists themselves were not ready or able to put on the kinds of public evangelistic campaigns as the Westerners were, and in the beginning they liked it very much. It seemed, at least at that time, that one could see quick fruit from labor. Thus in the early 1990's Western public evangelism was the "fashion." One would rent a building, advertise and promote, bring in Westerners, and have a series of evangelistic meetings. This brought much new excitement to the Baptist churches, and helped many to become more aware of the need to be open with proclamation of the gospel.

3. Other Appreciated Help

a. Credibility – Beginning mainly with the work of Billy Graham, being associated with respected Westerners was an important step in building credibility for Russian Baptists in the eyes of the Russian public. Baptists had for so long been marginalized in Russian society, and now here were these leaders from the West, respected over the world, expressing solidarity with the Baptists. It is difficult to express the positive impact that this had for the Baptists themselves, although the effect on the public at large may have been much less pronounced.

b. Materials – Westerners brought millions of Bibles and New Testaments, the Jesus film, and many other publications. This was greatly appreciated in the early days when there was such scarcity of materials.

c. Finances – Perhaps the most enduring appreciation has been for the millions of dollars of Western donations that have helped the churches. Many schools and churches were started or built on the foundation of Western funds. The generosity of Westerners was well received, and continues to be sought out by many. This money has its negative influences as well, which will be discussed below.

B. Points of Contention

1. Theological

a. Easy-believism – The communication of the gospel by Westerners raised questions in the minds of Baptists from the very beginning. As mentioned above, Russians put their stress on the issue of "repentance" in the conversion process. Probably assuming that all other Evangelicals did the same, they were surprised to hear Western messages without emphasis on repenting from sins. They wondered what the difference in thinking was between their message of repentance and that of Westerners to "believe in Jesus," "accept Christ," "receive Christ," etc. Soon they began to sense that Westerners were leaving this aspect out of their gospel presentations, and to them this was a different gospel. There can be no new life without turning from sin, and Westerners seemed to think that a person must simply believe in the work of Christ, regardless of what changes might occur in their lives, and they would be saved. Many Baptists began to wonder if Westerners really understood the gospel, and began to be very guarded against Western evangelistic thinking.

b. Eternal Security – In the minds of Baptists, the error in Western thinking mentioned above was made even more serious by the rapid communication of security of salvation to a person who had prayed a simple prayer of faith in Christ. In the first place, Baptists did not believe in security of salvation, as mentioned above. In the second place, coupled with an

easy-believers, the message of security did nothing but create complacent sinners who now felt safe to remain in their sins. This may not have been the message of more than a minority of Western preachers, but the mere mention of eternal security began to be associated with a dangerously shallow gospel. Many Baptists interpreted the teaching to mean that a person could be forgiven and then sin all he wanted to with impunity.

c. Conversion Process – Russian Baptists expect that a sinner will come to the point of repentance through a process, and they don't trust what happens in quick decisions. This is especially true when a person is hearing biblical ideas for the first time. Westerners tended to lean in what is considered a Calvinistic approach, expecting that the Holy Spirit will give new life when there is even a small bit of understanding and a minimum of conviction. Russians took the more Arminian approach, seeing that repentance was an act of the human heart, and that this heart needed to be carefully prepared to be ready for such a major change of life.

d. Childhood Conversion – Many visiting Westerners gave testimonies, in which they would say something like "When I was three years old, I came to know Jesus Christ." For Russian Baptists it was impossible to accept that a person could know Christ at such a young age. Consistent with their expectation of deeper understanding before true repentance can take place, they would not expect young people even below the age of fifteen to seriously repent.

2. Methodological

a. Based on Cultural Errors

i. Independent Activity - Russian Baptists observed the way that many Western organizations flooded into their country, working as if they were entering a third-world country that had never heard the gospel. They did not consult with Russian Evangelicals who had been working in Russia for well over a century. They came with their own programs and their own teachings, often only using the Baptists in order to help them get set up and find work for their missionaries to do. They did not learn Russian ways, and as a result made a multitude of errors that will be further explained below. Even those who worked with the Baptists tended to bring ready-packaged programs that they expected Baptists to help them fulfill. Such organizations could always find churches to help them, largely because of the financial aid that would commonly come along with the Westerners.

An even greater aspect of this problem was that many organizations came looking for Russian workers. They were able to pay good salaries, by Russian standards, and stole away some of the young people from the Baptist churches. Some Baptist leaders felt that such Westerners were beginning to harm the ongoing efforts of Russian churches, and this caused a great deal of damage to relationships.

Baptists called for Westerners to come and cooperate with Russians, negotiating together to reach a consensus about how to proceed. Methods that are planned carefully, listening to the Russian perspective, can be effective. Today, at the end of this decade, most Westerners who brought their own methods and worked independently are either very weak or have collapsed altogether. Those Western organizations that came in and did work in cooperation with Russians are still in Russia and are growing.

ii. Expensive Productions – Most of the campaign-style methods that Westerners used in Russia were way beyond the financial means of Baptists to reproduce. Rental of expensive halls, advertising, materials, and other components of such efforts thus became more of a "Western show." These might draw people who would observe them out of curiosity, but they would not be a model for Baptist churches when they would set out to do the evangelistic task that ultimately would have to be theirs.

iii. Door to Door Work – Russians are very sensitive to the fact that the general public is afraid to open the door to strangers. Much time can be wasted going from door to door, as some Western evangelistic organizations did. It is true that some people were reached in this way, but only a small fraction of them ended up in Baptist churches. The Westerner was able to arouse enough curiosity to be invited into a home, but the Russians did not have that advantage when it was time to invite those same people to come to churches. In addition, cults like Jehovah's Witnesses saturated many areas with this method and rendered it ineffective, as Russian people became tired of so many people coming to their doors to try to convert them to one thing or another.

iv. Taking Names – In all kinds of public or private evangelistic work, Westerners desired to provide to the churches a record of the people who had made some kind of positive response to the gospel. Russians didn't like the idea of putting names down on pieces of paper – it looked too much like communist bureaucracy. The result would be mistrust and fear, a very common feature of Russian life.

v. Ignorance of Language Barrier – Westerners who came to Russia were not able to speak Russian, which was understandable for those just arriving in a foreign country. However, the attitudes of Westerners toward the Russian language displayed an ignorance of how language barriers hinder communication. They often used translators who were not themselves believers and who did not understand the issues of the gospel that they were trying to translate. Even those who continued to live in Russia did not, as a rule, deeply learn Russian. They continued to rely on interpreters. Further, even those who spoke very good Russian did not understand all the nuances and subcontexts of the Russian language, and when speaking sometimes would lose the logic of the conversation. All of these problems should have given Westerners some pause, compelling them to cooperate with mature Russian believers, but this was too often not the case.

vi. Blindness to Mixed Motives – Westerners who came to Russia to do evangelism were always in need of helpers, and were anxious to gather new believers. However, in this process they often displayed great naivete regarding the presence of mixed motives within these two groups.

Among the workers that they sought out were translators, administrators and new leaders. For many of these positions they paid good money. The result was the almost proverbial Russian career of milking Westerners. Not comprehending the nuances of Russian culture, and wanting to believe that all those coming to them were sincere, Westerners were slow to see that they were often creating a team of hirelings. Many of these workers stayed only until a better opportunity came along elsewhere. Others left when they were no longer interested in improving their English skills with the American group, or else saw that these Westerners would not be able to help them emigrate to the West. Still others departed when they were expected to display the fruits of a spiritual life that they did not possess. There were those who were truly converted as well, but even many of these became discouraged by the naivete of their Western employers and were not able to mature in the way that would be necessary for them to carry on such work independently in the future.

Among many of the supposed converts were found some of the same mixed motives. Many Russian people responded to Westerners' evangelistic invitations in the first place for material reasons. They would often think, "If we raise our hands like they are asking, maybe we will get something out of this." They would then often discover the generosity of Westerners toward members of their churches, and would hang on as long as they were receiving some sort

of aid. The supposed converts who were also on payrolls caused great problems at times, such as when unconverted men ended up as leaders of groups. The inability to discern the wiles of the unconverted Russian mind condemned many Western evangelistic and church-planting works to ultimate failure.

b. Based on Theological Errors

i. Simplistic Presentations – Baptists have identified at least two ways in which presentations of the gospel by Westerners have been overly simplistic. The first relates to the problem of easy believism, as described above. Presentations by Westerners often made faith in Christ seem so easy that it could be reduced to a simple step of faith, as expressed in a simple prayer, and the deed would be done. Many presentations seemed designed to hide anything about the gospel that might tend to discourage the inquirer, even though Jesus calls people to count the cost of following Him.

The second type of overly simplistic presentation is a lack of respect for the intelligence of Russian people. Approaching Russian people, and especially adults, as if they had no understanding of spiritual things, many Westerners insult the listeners. In some men's prisons, some Americans would begin explaining to grown men what each bead of a gospel bracelet meant. This may be helpful for young children, but does very little good with grown men. Simple booklets such as the "Four Spiritual Laws" are also not appreciated as serious explanations of the gospel, and are often even repellant to the Russian listener. It would be better to say nothing than to give an explanation of the gospel that cannot be respected by the Russian person.

ii. Expectation of Immediate Results – Along with simplistic presentations, a simplistic expectation of response to the gospel also appeared. Westerners often presented the gospel as very easy to understand and very easy to apply to the heart. Thus, with very little explanation, a person was expected to make the most momentous decision of his life. Such thinking ignores many issues in the process to true belief. Russians need to gain a clear comprehension of the truth, and in many cases must overcome faulty thinking. This very often takes time, with repeated explanation and much exposure to the Bible.

Quick and shallow responses to simple messages resulted in rootless plants that almost immediately shriveled up and died. Many people who responded so quickly felt like they had done all that was required, and could return to their lives. If they had truly understand the call of the gospel, they would have contemplated it seriously before responding. The failure to understand this fact, in the opinion of Baptists, was a great error on the part of many Westerners.

Baptists see that Westerners are not serious about verifying the existence of true faith by the presence of spiritual fruit in the life. Thus they have never trusted the substance of such reports as 1,000 people coming forward at a meeting to be saved. They believe that they must trace those cases of "repentance" afterward – how many actually remain with Christ? They have seen that many come, but few stay.

iii. Decision Rituals – Most Western preachers like to give a seeker a concrete action to perform in order to enter into salvation. The most common action is the repetition of a "sinner's prayer," led by the preacher, after which a person will be asked to raise his hand or come forward in a meeting. Russian Baptists also utilize a form of decision ritual, in which a person will come forward in church to publicly repent of sin. The main differences are in the environment of this decision ritual and the level of trust placed in it.

Regarding the environment of the decision, Baptists want to see repentance by one person at a time, in the presence of witnesses. This has already been mentioned above in the context of the Baptist preference for repentance in a church. But the other point is that no individual can pray such a prayer of repentance in the midst of a large crowd of people responding in an evangelistic meeting. Such mass responses have little meaning to Baptists, who wonder how anyone can really tell who was or was not truly repenting in this large group. They even see it as a strange contradiction for American evangelists: How could the individualistic USA allow for a communal response in a collective form? It was strange to them. Rather, each individual needs special, personal work as he is hearing the gospel.

Regarding the level of trust in decisions, again Russian Baptists are going to congratulate, but then verify. Here again is the reason for the period of time between repentance and baptism. The person will prove his conversion by the fruit in his life. The overwhelmingly common response to mass "decisions" is the lack of any results in the lives of those who had come forward. Baptists say that these people were not repenting, but just praying a "first prayer." They didn't have enough teaching to comprehend the call of God. This is especially true in the light of common Russian ignorance of Christian truth. To give such a person a simple decision ritual at such a time was not only premature - it was deceptive. The result is that many leave and never return.