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THE RUSSIAN POLEMICAL LITERATURE ON RUSSIAN BAPTISTS.

BY DR. A. PALMIERI.

At the outset of this paper it may be worth while to remind our readers that Russian policy makes an earnest effort to mould all the religious denominations of the Empire in the shape of the same Orthodoxy. A special code of laws promulgated at several times has for its sole purpose the eradication from the Russian soil of the so-called "*heterodox perversity*" the foreign tares, the baleful germs, of doctrines alien to the revealed truths. Doubtless the severe ukases issued by Czars who were often unbelievers to protect the purity of the orthodox faith against heretical infiltrations have been mitigated in the process of time by that spirit of modernity whose influence even conservative Russia cannot entirely cast off. It would be indeed distasteful in our days to burn a stubborn monk, as Abbakum, the first martyr of the Russian raskol in the age of Peter the Great, or to behead nuns as Euphrosyne Morozov, for their obstinacy in holding to the old and erroneous translation of the Russian liturgical books.

But the old leaven of religious intolerance is still embedded in the hearts of Russian political rulers, and when the helm of the Russian church falls into the hands of a man of the temper of Constantin Petrovic Pobiedonostzev, the life of the so-called *heterodox* denominations in Russia becomes worse and worse, and they are continually hammered by the forgers of the Russification.

Among the Russian dissenters, against which Russian politics sanctions radical measures and prescribes the severest penalties, Baptists take the first place. They are generally looked upon by pious and well-minded orthodox priests, as dreadful worms gnawing at the very roots of the Russian church.

No better argument to corroborate our saying may be afforded than the authority of the above-named Constantin Pobiedonostzev, the famous Chief Procurator who embodied in himself the truisms of Russian religious intolerance and political fanaticism. In the official report of 1901 on the conditions of the Russian orthodoxy he declared boldly that from a double point of view, either religious or political, Baptists may be classed as the most dangerous of the Russian sectarians (1). It must be remembered here that in a document issued by the Council of the Russian Ministers, on July 4, 1894, and in a circular of the Ministers for the Home Department, addressed September 3rd, of the same year to the civil authorities in the empire, the various Baptist denominations, designated by the common name of *Stundism*, were described as very noxious to the welfare of the Russian people as disturbing the quiet life of the Russian orthodox parishes, as poisoning with the virus of false doctrine the simple hearts of Russian *mujiks*. The strongest charges against Baptists were suggested by Pobiedonostzev, who rested upon violence and the support of the civil power, when the successful spreading of heterodox denominations disarranged his plans for a religious unification of the Russian empire.

In compliance with Pobiedonostzev, a writer of shameful repute, D. Skwortzov, the insatiable devourer of heterodox denominations in Russia, denounced the Baptist movement as being headed by a rabble of wretched men, groping in spiritual darkness. The most fearful sowers of nihilism and rationalism; the subverters of both the political and social institutions, and, therefore, worthy of hanging (2).

As we said above, the general term of *Stundism* is used to designate the various Baptist denominations, spreading within the boundaries of the Russian empire. This name clearly points out the German origin of the Russian Baptists. It is derived from the common noun (*Stunde*-hour, in German), and was applied to the Bap-

tist denominations, because it is customary to their believers to meet together in prayer-houses at appointed hours for singing hymns, or reading and explaining the Holy Scriptures. True Baptists, that is, says Koziakovsky, the Baptists who before enrolling in their ranks the Christians of other denominations baptize them again, are called: *Stundo-Baptists* or *Staro Baptists* (Old Baptists). The *Mladostundists* (young stundists) correspond to Pedo-baptists, as concerns their peculiar beliefs about infant baptism. *Stundism* is defined by Nezdienitzky, as the naturalization on Russian soil of the various Protestant bodies and of their dominant features, worked out and developed under the influence of German Baptists, Russian writers reckon *Stundism* among the rationalistic sects of the Russian empire, and bring to light its strongest affinities with the sects of Molokans, spiritual Christians, evangelical Christians, etc.

The first charge brought by Russian ecclesiastical writers against Baptists is their foreign origin. No doubt, the first seeds of Baptist doctrines in South Russia were scattered by German settlers, and, under this aspect, it is true that the Baptist movement is a direct outgrowth of German Protestantism. In Little Russia there are some settlements of German peasants, who were attracted to that country by the fertility of the soil, and the privilege granted to them by Czars. As we learn from Russian sources, the first pioneers of the Baptist movement are to be found in the ranks of the pastors invested with the spiritual headships of those German settlements. The most energetic of them was Pastor Bonnkämpfer. Russian peasants, who were engaged by German settlers in their agricultural work, were not slow to admire and envy the flourishing conditions, welfare of their masters, and to experience that they were indebted for it to their well-regulated life and to the influence of their religious beliefs. On their side, German settlers jeered at the paganism of the orthodox church, especially at the worship of the sacred images, and hooted at the indiffer-

ence of the Russian clergy respecting the moral improvement of the peasant class. These combined influences led some Russian peasants to the abjuration of the orthodox faith, and to the acceptance of Baptist doctrines. The chief factor in this movement became Michael Ratusky. He was, says a warm truthseeker, one of those feeling hearts which abound among the Russian peasantry, and who being unable to exert their own moral energies within the pale of the Russian official church, raise up schisms. At the outset, he followed the vestiges of all the seekers for religious truths. He went on like a shuttle from convent to convent, entreating all, either laymen or **monks**, to show him the pathway leading souls to the full possession of the gospel and the truth. At Kiev he met a peasant like himself, a certain Gerasimus Balabaska, and dwelt with him in long-continued conversations upon matters of faith. At length they agree in the necessity of casting off the yoke of the orthodox church in order to inaugurate a new spiritual life. To realize that purpose they took refuge in a German settlement of Baptists, and appropriated to themselves their doctrines. The cradle of the Russian Baptists was the village of Osnova, in the province of Odessa: and their first preachers a peasant named Onissenko, and Michael Ratusky. The former, say Russian Baptists, was endowed with the light of the gospel; the latter had received the gift of the reason, that is, the true sense of the Holy Scriptures. The followers of Ratusky met together in a house, gave themselves to the reading of the Gospel and sang sacred hymns. As German Baptists, they ceased to smoke, to abandon themselves to the drinking of alcoholic liquors, and to lead a corrupt life.

From the village of Osnova, the Baptist movement pervaded the village of Ignatovka, and the town of Riasnople. Forty families gave their names to the new denomination.

Russian orthodox priests began to bawl out alarming cries, and to draw the attention of the civil power on

these deserters, who to the utmost scandal of their orthodox flock, burned up the sacred images adorning their houses, left their children unbaptized, and crossed no longer the threshold of orthodox churches. Ratusky and his brother were thrown into prison by order of the government of Odessa. But repressive measures gave a new impulse to the Baptist movement. Gerasimus Balaban, Ephim Cymbala, Ivan Riabosapki, Paul Czibulsky gained many believers to Baptist standards in the province of Kiev, Harkov, and Elizabethgrad. Some of them were arrested, and some banished from their villages. To instigate their flocks against Baptists, Russian orthodox priests started by exciting their patriotic feelings. They called Baptists by the names of agents of German politics, disguised spies of the German Lutheranism, *Niemetz* (German). Whoever has lived in Germany a little while, may understand the substratum of hatred with which is wreathed the name of *Niemetz*. The present war, to some extent, made it bare.

The German element is charged with all the calamities that strike Holy Russia, with the political oppression that hampers the onward movement of native Russians, hungering for liberty and progress. In the Russian bureaucracy, as well as in the Russian universities and army and navy, German names are in great prevalence upon Russian names. Add to this, that according to the public opinion the secret springs of Russian policy are to be found in the minds of the Germans naturalized on the Russian soil. Consequently, the epithet of *Niemetz* given to the members of a religious body in Russia makes them odious to Russian patriots, and almost traitors to their own country. No wonder, then, if Russian polemical writers very often put together in their writings the names of *Baptists* and *Niemetz* to brand them with a mark of infamy (4).

Notwithstanding the persecutions to which were exposed the Russian Baptists; notwithstanding the shutting up of their meeting-houses, the Baptist movement

did not cease gaining ground. It overran the provinces of Kaluga, Nijny-Novgorod, Orenburg, Pensa, Samara, Saratov, Tambov, Riazan, Smolensk, Moscow. After the promulgation of the liberty of conscience in Russia in 1905 it received a new and vigorous impulse, and Russian missionaries are unable to stop it.

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We do not purpose in this preliminary sketch to give a detailed account of the Baptist doctrines, as they are outlined in the biased writings of the Russian orthodox controversialists. We confine ourselves to point out the general lines of Baptist teaching, as it is exhibited in some general works on Russian *sectarians*, especially in the works of Skvortzov, Dobroklonsky, Znamensky, Plotnikov, etc. Baptists in Russia acknowledge the Holy Scripture as the sole ultimate of faith, that is, they do not admit of the authority of the sacred tradition in ecclesiastical matters. Their dogmatic teaching is limited to a few points. They believe in the trinity of the divine Persons, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and in the atonement. As concerns original sin and its effects, they follow Protestant standards of faith. Among the motives of justification, they reckon repentance and prayers.

In contrast with the dogmatic narrowness of Baptist theological doctrine the practical life of Baptists has reached a high development. They deny the divine institution of the hierarchy. In their opinion, the state church is a corrupted body: priests, the scions of those Pharisees who crucified Jesus Christ; the seducers of souls, the lying prophets, foretold in the Gospel. Members of the orthodox church are looked upon as embodying the superstitions of the Roman and Greek heathenism. Baptists call themselves spiritual Christians, friends of God, brethren of the new covenant: their doctrine is magnified as the vital suck of the Gospel. They cast off the worship of the Mother of Jesus, of Angels and Saints, of relics and sacred images, and affect a great

disregard for St. Nicholas of Myra, the venerated patron saint of the Russian people. The old customs of the primitive church have been ostracised by them. Their meeting-houses are stripped of crucifixes and sacred images: fast days are not observed by them; even more, they are considered as practices deviating from the spirit of Christianity. As Holy Days they celebrate only Sundays, Easter, Christmas and Pentecost. In accordance with their theories about the hierarchy they have as ministers of worship only *presbyteri*, or elders; teachers, and deacons (servants). Some bodies of the *Stundo-baptism* are wont to use the laying of hands upon the members who have been appointed to perform their liturgical functions. Some others, however, refuse the value and meaning of that ceremony.

As to baptism, generally the Russian Baptists deny the sacramental value of baptism and communion, or look upon them from a purely Lutheran point of view. Baptism is a symbolical act, which expresses our faith in Jesus Christ, and the firm assurance of the remission of our sins. Likewise, they consider the communion as a commemoration of the Lord's Supper, a spiritual eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

Most Baptists in Russia do not baptize children; while baptizing again the members of other Christian denominations going to them: but there are some branches who baptize children (*pedobaptists*), and open their ranks to Christians of other denominations, without imposing upon them a new baptism. The *Mladostundists* of *Ciaplinka*, in the province of Kiev, do practice neither baptism by immersion, nor the Holy Communion. Their confession of faith reads so: "We believe that to be baptized in the death of Jesus Christ means to die to the world, and to rise up by repentance into the glory of the Father. We believe that Jesus Christ is the bread of life: we hope that our Saviour is the wine branch, the suck of which we must drink. We hear His living words, and thus we receive His flesh and blood."

The Sacrament of penance is for Russian Baptists an inward contrition for sins. There are also some Baptists who have kept on the ancient practice of public confession.

As liturgical ceremonies they have marriage, funeral services, the imposition of a Christian name to children, the extreme unction, the washing of the feet. Their services consist in the reading of some passages of the Holy Scripture, in their explanation, in the singing of sacred hymns, written by Russian or German Baptists, or by leading rulers of the body of Paskovtzy.

Dobroklonsky ascribes to Russian Baptists the spreading of doctrines that are sapping the grounds of civil society, namely, the equalness of all men, the abolition of individual property, the inutility of justice courts, the illegality of oaths, the mischievousness of war, and above all, their inclination towards Germany. As is the case with all Russian ecclesiastical writers, they pass over in silence the moral and domestic virtues, by which the Stundo-Baptists are gaining the confidence of the best elements of the Russian peasantry. (5).

Historical researches on Russian Baptists have received a potent impulse during the first decade of our century by the publication of some very important collections of papers and documents relative to the Baptist movement in South Russia. The most valuable collection is that which has been published in Kazan in 1908 by Bishop Alexis (6), rector of the ecclesiastical *Academy of the same city* under the title of: *Materials Concerning the History of the Religious Rationalistic Movement in South Russia during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century* (7). From the documents collected in the above-mentioned volume, Bishop Alexis makes a careful study of the modern history of the Stundo-baptism in the South-Russian provinces. The title of this elaborate work, issued in 1909, at Kazan, is *The Religious Rationalistic Movement in South Russia during the second half of the Nineteenth Century* (8). There is here to be found a

complete account of the characteristics, customs, beliefs, morals, confessions of faith, and development of the Russian Baptists. To Bishop Alexis we are also indebted for an historical sketch of the rising and further spreading of the Baptists in the Christian world. This interesting sketch has been published in the important periodical review of the Ecclesiastical Academy of Kazan: *The Orthodox Lecturer* (9). But Bishop Alexis did not confine himself to record the vicissitudes of the Russian Baptists. As it suits very well a zealot of the orthodox faith, he wrote an *Essay of an orthodox catechism against Stundism* (10), and a little *treatise about the communion*, as it is understood by Stundo-Baptists (11).

In 1908, a lawyer of Petrograd, Basil Bone-Bruevic, undertook the publication of a series of volumes under the general title of *Materials belonging to the history and the study of the Russian sects and of the raskol*. The first and third volumes of that series which were issued in Petrograd in 1908 and 1910 are of considerable importance for the historians of the Baptist movement in South Russia (12). We do not exaggerate by stating that they afford us the scientific ground for a complete history of the Russian Baptists. The Russian polemical literature possesses also some valuable books on the History of the Baptist Movement in Russia. They, however, have been framed on the lines of a narrow-minded orthodoxy, and therefore, they are unable to give us a faithful portraiture of the Russian Baptists. The most learned and extensive among them is *The History of the Stundism in South Russia*, by protoierevs A. Rojdestvensky (13). We find also precious information about Russian Baptists in the volumes of the Russian priest, T. Nezdienitzky, *The Stundism, the cause of its rising, and an examination of its doctrines*, Petrograd, 1899, (14), where is to be found a detailed account of Baptist theological tenets: in the illustrated and interesting work of B. I. Iasevic-Borodaevskaia, *The Sectarians in the Province of*

Kiev (15); in the popular sketches of the Russian priest Noskov: *Who was the founder of the Stundo-Baptist faith* (16), and *Whence came into Russia the Baptist sect* (17), and lastly in the Polish work of Nickel: *The Baptists: Who they are: In what they distinguish themselves from the remaining Russian sects* (18).

The Russian polemical literature against Baptist theology assumes generally a popular character, and dwells above all on the question of infant baptism. There are, however, some volumes of greater importance, that aim especially at enabling orthodox missionaries to refute the leaders of the Baptist movement. The weightiest product in this field has issued from the pen of a priest of Kiev, Sergius Bogdanovic: *Controversial discoveries of an orthodox missionary with Stundists* (19). As general handbooks of orthodox polemics against Baptist theological tenets are also to be considered the volumes of John Bogoroditzky, *Discourses about the fundamental doctrines of the Christian orthodox church against Baptist sectarians*, Kiev, 1894 (20); Bystrov, *Discourses on some truths of the orthodox faith against Baptists* (21), a treatise conducted on Scriptural and patriotic lines; Dankevic, *Discourses aiming at the preservation of the orthodox faith from Stundist errors* (22); Kuntzevic and Pladykov, *Handbook for preachers against Baptists* (23): Arch-priest Rusanov, *On the orthodox Christian faith according to the divine revelation against Molokans and Baptists* (24), where are discussed the controverted doctrines between Baptists and orthodox about the nature of the church, the Sacraments (Baptism, Lord's Supper and Penance), the Sacred Tradition, the worship of the sacred images, the oath, the prayers for departed souls, fasts and the worship of saints; Strielbitzky, *A short survey of Stundism, and a collection of quotations for refuting it* (25), and lastly the above quoted work of Nezdienitzky, to which is appended the *Little Catechism, or the Exposition of the Confession of Faith of the Russian Baptists or Christians baptized in their ripe age, and remarks on it*.

The popular polemics comprehends a series of pamphlets of John Arseniev (26), P. Bielinov (27); archimandrite Barsonuphius (28), Griniakin (29), Kuntzevic (30), Noskov, to whom belong some polemical treatises on Baptist theological tenets about the true priesthood and Baptist ministers (31), the true church of Christ and Baptist society (32), the worship of the sacred images against the Russian Baptist pastor, Basil Stepanov (33), the Sacred Tradition and Baptist tradition (34), the salaries of the clergy and Baptist collections in their meeting-houses (35), and the ecclesiastical revenues of Baptist communities (36); and lastly Sselekov (37).

The question of infant baptism seems to attract in a peculiar manner the attention of the Russian orthodox missionaries, because it involves some implications from a political standpoint. Indeed the certificates of baptism are utilized by the Russian government in the recruiting of soldiers. The question of infant baptism gave occasion to some books or pamphlets, published by the most fanatical of the Russian missionaries, I. Aivazov (38); by the archpriest Butkevic, professor in the ecclesiastical seminary of Kharkov (39), and Sselekov (40).

We pass over in silence some recent publications concerning Baptist liturgy, social doctrines, and methods of propaganda, but the incomplete list of the very recent Russian polemical writings against the Baptist movement makes it plain that Baptists are really gaining ground in Russia, and are exerting a powerful religious influence upon the Russian peasantry by the simplicity of their evangelistic spirit, and the fervor of their faith. No doubt, therefore, that the careful study of the Russian anti-Baptist literature will add some interesting pages to the Baptist movement throughout the world.

(1) *Pravoslavnyi Putevoditel* (The Orthodox Guide), 1905 (Petrograd), t. 11, p. 572. This is a periodical review founded in 1903 in

order to fight against Russian dissenters. See Palmieri, *La Chiesa russa*, Florence, 1908, pp. 445-446.

(2) *Missionersky Sputnik* (The Orthodox Guide), Petrograd, 1904, p. 467.

(3) Tsakni, *La Russie sectaire*, Paris, 1888, p. 190.

(4) Velitzin, *The German Invasion in Russia*, *Russkii Vlastnik*, 1890. Kalnev, *Niemtzy i Stundobaptizm* (German and the Stundo-Baptism).—Odessa, 1911.

(5) Skvortzov, *Missionersky sputnik* (The Guide of the Missionaries), Petrograd, 1904. Dobroklonsky, *History of the Russian Church* (Russian), Riazan, 1893 (vol. IV); Znamensky, *Handbook of History of the Russian Church* (Russian), Petrograd, 1904; Plotnikov, *History and Refutation of the Russian Sectarians* (Russian), Petrograd, 1910.

(6) Bishop Alexis (Aleksiei Molcianov), born on October, 1853, in a village of the diocese of Viatka, is a graduate of the Ecclesiastical Academy of Kazan (1883-1887). He was consecrated as priest in 1885, and as bishop of Cistopole on September 10, 1900. In the same year he was appointed Rector of the Kazan Academy. In 1905, he was appointed bishop of Tavriides, in 1910, bishop of Pskov, and in 1912, bishop of Tobolsk.

(7) *Materialy dlia istorii religiozno-ratzionalisticheskago dvizheniia na iughie Rossii vo vtoroi polovinie XIX-go stolietiiia*. Kazan, 1908.

(8) *Religiozno-ratzionalisticheskoe dvizhenie na iughie Rossii vo vtoroi polovinie XIX-go stolietiiia*. Kazan, 1909.

(9) *Historia sekty Baptistov*, *Pravoslavnyi Sobesieknik*, 1908, I. 457-480: 681-702.

(10) *Opyt pravoslavnago protivochtundistskago catikhizlsa*, Kazan, 1910.

(11) *O tainstvie prichasseniia*. Petrograd, 1912.

(12) *Materialy k istorii i izuceniiu russkago sektantsva i raskola*. Vol I *Baptisty*. Petrograd, 1908—vol iii. *Stundists*—Petrograd, 1910.

(13) *Jugno-russkii Stundizm: izliedovanie*, Petrograd, 1889.

(14) *Stundizm, priciny poiavleniia i razbor uceniia ego*, Petrograd, 1899.

(15) *Sektanstvo v Klevskoi gubernii*, Petrograd, 1902.

(16) *Kto osnoval stundo-baptistskuiu vieru*, Balasev, 1911.

(17) *Otkuda iavilos sekta Baptistov na Rusi*, Balasev, 1912.

(18) *Baptysci Kto oni. Czem odrozniiaja sie od vyznancow innyck religii*. Warsaw, 1907. Of the Baptist movement in North-west Russia treats the recent book of Milovidov: *Sovremennoe stundo-baptiskoe dvizhenie v Sievero-Zapadnom kraie*, Wilna, 1910. The problem of the earliest origins of the Baptists of Malorussia has been elucidated in Koziltzky, *Vopros o proiskhojdenii Jujnorusskago stundizma v nasei literaturie*, Petrograd, 1909.

(19) *Besiedy pravoslavnago misionera s stundistami*, Kiev, 1908.

- (20) **Besledy o vajnieisikh istinakh khristianskoi pravoslavnoi Tzerkvi protiv sektantov-stundistov**, Kiev, 1894.
- (21) **Besledy o raznykh istinakh pravoslavnoi vlery protiv baptistov**. Pensa, 1889.
- (22) **Pouceniiia v ograjdenie pravoslavnoi vlery ot stunditskikh zabludjenii**, Moscow, 1893.
- (23) **Posobie pri besiedakh s baptistami**, Akhtyrka, 1911.
- (24) **O pravoslavnoi khristianskoi verie po uceniu slova bojia, protiv Molokan i Baptistov**, Petrograd, 1891, 1897.
- (25) **Kratkii ocerk stundizma i svod textov, napravlennykh k ego obliceniu**. Odessa, 1898.
- (26) **Besledy s tak nazyvaemymi stundistami**, Moscow, 1899.
- (27) **O baptizme**, Kamysln, 1905.
- (28) **Besledy s Novgorodskimi Baptistami**, Novgorod, 1909.
- (29) **Beregis stundy**, Petrograd, 1910.
- (30) **Loj Baptizma**, Novocerkassk, 1910.
- (31) **Besieda ob istinnom sviasentsvie u Ijepresbiterakh Baptistov**. Balasev, 1912.
- (32) **Besieda o istinnoi Tzerkvi Khristovoi i obsestvie Baptistov**. Balasev, 1912.
- (33) **Besieda o pocitanii sv. ikon, vedennaia s Ijepresbiterom Baptistov, B. Stepanov**, Balasev, 1912.
- (34) **Besieda o sviasennom predanii i predanii Baptistov**. Balasev, 1912.
- (35) **Kak sobiraiut Baptisty s clenov obsin**. Balasev, 1910.
- (36) **Skolko raskhoduiut Baptisty na svoi dukhovnyia nujdy**. Balasev, 1911.
- (37) **Baptizm i sekta Evangeliskikh khristian**. Moghilev, 1911.
- (38) **O kresenii mladentzev**, Moscow, 1910.
- (39) **O kresenii mladentzev**, Kharkov, 1909. **Ycenie Baptistov o talnstvie kreseniia**. Kharkov, 1909.
- (40) **Nujno-li krestit mladentzev**, Moghilev, 1911.