

Recently a number of the publications was observed in the Tver press which authors expressed the prejudiced opinion on baptists. It has induced me to prepare this article in which I try to tell about baptists.

### **Who are they?**

The Big Soviet Encyclopedia speaks about Christians-baptists: "Baptists (from Greek "baptize" - I dip, by immersing in water). According to dogma of doctrine of the Baptists, the person can be saved only through personal belief in Christ, instead of through church intermediary; a unique source of belief is the Scripture".

Formally the doctrine of the Baptists has arisen during an epoch of Reformation in the XVII-th century beginning. However to assert that the doctrine of the Baptists as the doctrine originates at this time, in a root not truly. Christians-baptists haven't thought up anything new but only have returned to the principles of Christian belief clearly stated in the Bible. In dogma and the sermon the main place is occupied with a moral-instructive problematic. The basic attention during the services is given to the sermon which can be preached not only by pastor, but also by preachers from among ordinary believers. The great value in service is given to singing: choral, to the general, solo. Important components of service meeting are the general and individual prayers. The basic certificates of religious rite are a water baptism on belief and Lord's Supper. The baptism is made by immersing a believer into water. The spiritual sense is given to this certificate: When believer is baptized, he "dies with the Christ", and, leaving waters is "resurrection with Christ" for new life. Besides, weddings, prayers of blessing of children, burials of the died are carried out. All it is spent free of charge.

### **Baptists in Russia**

The beginning of baptist movement in Russia considers 1867 when Nikita Voronin was baptized in the river Kure in Tiflis (Tbilisi). He became subsequently one of known and active preachers of the Gospel. In 60-70th years the doctrine of the Baptists has extended in Ukraine, in the

Volga region. In 1884 the Union of Russian baptists was established. In 1874 in S.Peterburg the English lord G.Redstok and the retired colonel the prince V.Pashkov began the Gospel sermon. By their efforts ideas of evangelical Christians extended among the Petersburg nobility. By 1912 in Russia were 115 thousand baptists and 31 thousand evangelical Christians. By 1927 number of evangelical Christians and baptists has reached 500 thousand. However in 1928 reprisals which have ceased only to the middle of 40th years began. In 1944 the Union of evangelical Christians-baptists has been formed.

### **The Russian Union of evangelical christians-baptists today**

The Russian Union of evangelical Christians-baptists is today the largest Protestant Christian association in Russia both on number of communities and followers, and in respect of prevalence on territory of the country. It is based on an autonomy principle of local churches and coordination of the purposes of joint service. 45 regional associations headed by bishops carry out coordination. The union includes about 1100 local churches.

The Russian Union has system spiritually-educational institutions. They are: the Moscow theological seminary, the Moscow theological institute, a number of internal and correspondence Bible schools in many regional centers of Russia. Almost in every local church there are Sunday schools for children.

The Russian Union and many regional associations have the publishing base, and also carry out work in an ether (for example, transfers "Into place" on channel "Russian Radio").

Spiritually-educational and charitable work of Evangelical Christians-baptists is highly appreciated by the President of the Russian Federation. In March, 2002 the bishop of Samara region Victor Rjaguzov is awarded the order "Friendship of the People". Bishops N.Romanenko and G.Abramov received government awards.

The church of evangelical christians-baptists in a city of Tver is going to celebrate the 120-year-old anniversary. So baptists in Tver - not a product of "a reorganization epoch" or "expansion of the western preachers", and a historical reality. The Tver evangelical christians-baptists ministers in two houses of worship: on Griboedov's street, 35/68 and on street of 1st Zheltikovskiy, 14.

## **Relations between the Russian Baptist Union and Russian Orthodox Church**

In mutual relations of baptists and orthodox there were different periods. From the moment of occurrence of baptists in Russia Russian Orthodox Church, leaning against the help of the state, struggled with baptists. Some simplification has come after the Manifesto on October, 17th, 1905, proclaimed a toleration principle. In the thirties of the XX-th centuries ministers of Baptist churches were with orthodox ministers in one prison cells and camp barracks and together glorified God in prayers and singing.

Whether baptists are heretics from a position of orthodox Christians? What do official documents of Russian Orthodox Church tell about? In the book "Orthodoxy and ecumenism. Documents and materials 1902-1997" it is written: "Anglicans and Protestants were a product of Reformation; in dialogue with Orthodox Church they have been never condemned neither Universal, nor local Cathedrals ... Church cathedrally and officially didn't declare them as heretics. Officially and canonically they are our brothers mistaking in belief in the Christ, brothers on unity in baptism and on their participation to the Christ's" (p. 19-20).

Perhaps, the brightest event which is throwing light on modern level of mutual relations was the Anniversary international interconfessional conference devoted to the 2000 anniversary of Christianity which has taken place on November, 23-25th, 1999 in Moscow. It has been organized by Christian interconfessional advisory committee, which cochairmen are: the metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill from Russian Orthodox Church; Archbishop Tadeush Kondrusevich from Catholics and the chairman of Russian Baptist Union Pyotr Konovalchik from Protestants.

In a salutatory word Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexi-II told: "the Present conference serves as a vivid example of that Christians clearly realize necessity to promote the statement in public consciousness of Christian values and reference points by common efforts".

In the plenary report metropolitan Kirill spoke about some prominent aspects of interconfessional relations:

"Cooperation in social service of representatives of various Christian faiths is represented to me as extremely important. We, the Christ's followers, should show a kind example for our politicians".

"Despite historical complexities in interconfessional relations, it is possible to speak more likely about cooperation and peaceful co-existence, than about enmity".

"Certainly, I am far from representing relations of Christian faiths in pre-revolutionary time in pink tones. Certainly, state status of Orthodox Church in Russia and the overwhelming majority of citizens belonged to Orthodoxy, led to a known marginalization of other Christian faiths".

"Entering the XXI-st century, all Christians urged to testify to the world, making, like John the Baptist "a way to the Lord" in hearts of people. It is necessary for us to unite our efforts in order that concepts of good, justice and sanctity had defining value that we and our children can live (Gen. 43,8)".

In the total document of Anniversary conference has been written down:

"Anniversary should become an occasion to more fruitful interchristian and interreligious cooperation; promote creation of base for their further development. Our Churches and church communities should set an example to society and the world in mutual understanding and cooperation business".

"To fulfill the duty before God and people successfully, Christian Churches should show to a society experience of the reconciled cooperation".

How are practically realized these good intentions? Celebrating of the 2000 anniversary of Christianity and a meeting of the third millennium was one of the most significant joint programs. The secular power took part in the organization of celebrating of this anniversary; also the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation №1468 has been published. Along with heads of Orthodox Church, representatives of other Christian faiths, including the chairman of Russian Baptist Union Pyotr Konovalchik entered into committee on preparation for celebrating

of anniversary.

Past errors are corrected also. One of practical steps was the letter of Department of the external church intercourses of the Moscow Patriarchy to the chairman of Russian Baptist Union Pyotr Konovalchik №3551, in which the regret about the brochure edition "Baptists - the most harmful sect" is stated and it is told that "to publishers, a farmstead of a monastery of St. Panteleimon the prevention for an autocratic premise of the reference to blessing of the Patriarch" is made.

As to Tver, celebrating has turned out separate. At first there were joint actions the Tver Diocese and city Administration. And only in 2002 the group of Christian from not orthodox churches (two Tver Baptist churches and eight churches of other Christian faiths) showed a film "Jesus" though the organizing committee submitted the reference to city Administration in 2001. In this joint work as pastors, and ordinary believers of these churches have considerably approached and have made friends.

After showing of film "Jesus" there were publications in the press in which baptists were accused of prosecution of the "latent" purposes. Our aim, as well as of all Christians, is told by our Lord: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you". To execute this precept we not only participated in display of a film "Jesus", but also we give spiritually-educational talks with those who have interest to the Bible. For example, we have meetings in the Tver Officers' Club (garrison) on Sundays from 16 o'clock. We "do not entice" orthodox Christians as they on Sundays go to temples, and they have spiritual pastors; but we want to serve those people whom, speaking to words of Lord Jesus Christ, "as the sheep who do not have the pastor".

**Yury Zaika, deacon of church of evangelical christians-baptists of Tver**

On materials of a site of Tver Baptist association: <http://www.tverbaptist.ru/>