ABSTRACT

The Russian-Ukrainian community of Evangelical Christians existed in the village of Benito, Manitoba from 1928 until 1996. The community chose to identify as a Russian-Ukrainian one, although members of Ukrainian origin predominated at any given time throughout the life of the church. The church also chose to be a part of the Slavic Evangelical Union in Canada rather than to join stronger Ukrainian- or English-speaking Protestant organizations. The main reason for that was that the Evangelical Christians in the diaspora, including those of Benito, were an inalienable part of the larger tradition of religious dissent shared by many peoples of the former Russian Empire.

The movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians emerged in the 1870-ies in St. Petersburg and soon spread throughout the Russian Empire. It flourished under the able leadership of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869-1935). The movement turned into a transnational phenomenon present in over twenty countries following the demise of the empire in 1917. Canada became home to thousands of Slavic Evangelical Christians who arrived in this country between the early 1900s and the late 1940s. Slavic Evangelical migratory experience possessed a high degree of religious significance for the settlers and is best understood as biblical wandering toward the “New Jerusalem,” a physical place where religious, political, social, and economic ideals converge.

Slavic Evangelical Christians were an evangelical Protestant group. They were non-exclusive and ecumenically-minded movement with a special emphasis on a wholesale regeneration of the nation. Their focus upon non-denominationalism, a loose non-hierarchical structure, and a belief in the providential significance of Russia and the Slavic lands in the coming worldwide spiritual regeneration made them a distinct
religious denomination in spite of theological and practical similarities with such Christian groups as Baptists, Mennonites, or Disciples of Christ.

Although the Benito community generally evolved along the lines, common to other religious communities in the Canadian Prairies, its fate ultimately depended upon the success or failure of the transnational Slavic Evangelical Christian project. The decline of the movement of Evangelical Christians worldwide was the primary cause of the decline of the church, coupled by other factors, such as assimilation and rural depopulation.
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The idea to conduct a study of Slavic Evangelicals in Manitoba first emerged in a conversation with a long-time friend of mine, Mr. Vladislav Petrusevich of Linden, Manitoba. A native of Russia and a member of the Mennonite church, Mr. Petrusevich has a deep personal interest in the history and heritage of the Slavic Evangelicals. He kindly accompanied me on all my study trips to Benito and the area and provided me with a number of relevant books, articles, photos, and ideas.

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I’m deeply thankful to a number of people who provided me with assistance or hospitality on my field trips to Manitoba and Saskatchewan, among them Andreas Rahn and family, Nikolai Afanasyev, and the members of the Kamsack Doukhobor meeting. I’m very grateful to the University of Calgary for financing my field research and related trips.
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Introduction

This work is devoted to Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada, a group of settlers who once constituted an important stream of religious immigration to this country along with such larger and better known communities of Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors.¹ Slavic Evangelical Christians, in their majority ethnic Ukrainians, started to populate Canada in the early 20th century. Their immigration to Canada continued at varying pace throughout the first half of the last century, reaching its peak between the late 1920s and late 1940s. Most Slavic Evangelicals settled in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, although communities also existed in Ontario and British Columbia. With the virtual stop of any immigration from the USSR after WWII, because of rapid assimilation, and, especially, due to a profound ideological crisis of the movement, communities of Slavic Evangelicals in Canada entered a period of decline which resulted in the disintegration of most Slavic Evangelical churches by the end of the 20th century.

The author took an interest in the topic when he first learnt about the Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians in the small town of Benito in Manitoba, about 400 kilometres to the north-west of Winnipeg. The author stumbled upon such questions as why it was a Russian-Ukrainian church in a province where Ukrainians outnumber Russians at least 8 to 1² and where Ukrainians and Russians usually have had

¹ On the three other groups and their relationship with the Canadian government see William Janzen, Limits on liberty: the experience of Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor communities in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
separate ethnic organizations. Next, the question arose as to why it was a community of *Evangelical Christians* in a province where most other Ukrainian Protestants were Baptists. A suggestion inevitably came to mind that these two facts might have something to do with each other. Finally, the question remained as to why the church, once hundreds of members strong, ceased to exist, and how, if at all, its disintegration was connected with the first two facts. This thesis is an earnest attempt to find plausible answers to these questions.

**Who Are “Slavic Evangelical Christians”?**

Although, generally speaking, any “born-again” Christians would be commonly labelled as Evangelicals within the North American context, this term has a very specific meaning for the purposes of this thesis. By Evangelical Christians we understand members or affiliates of the movement of *evangel’kie khristiane*, followers of Vasilii Aleksandrovich Pashkov (1833-1902), sometimes called Pashkovites, and later Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869-1935). This movement first emerged in the North-Western part of the Russian Empire (particularly the city of St. Petersburg) in the 1860s, and later, especially under the leadership of Prokhanov, spread throughout the Empire. The movement was brought to Russia by a Western, namely, British, preacher and had a considerable following among the aristocracy in St. Petersburg in 1870s. From that geographical and cultural milieu the movement spread to other areas of the northwest of the empire (including modern Eastern Poland, Western Ukraine and Belorussia). The

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Evangelical revival in the northwest chronologically coincided with “Stundist”\(^4\) and “Baptist” revivals in two other geographical locations across Russia – what is now central and southern Ukraine (Stundism), and Caucasus (Baptist faith).\(^5\) Due to emigration, both pre-Revolutionary, and after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, as well as following the independence of Poland (1918), the Slavic Evangelical movement became a global phenomenon, present in many countries from Canada to Argentina and from Germany to China.\(^6\)

Ivan Prokhanov managed and co-ordinated activities of this diasporic church from Berlin until his death in 1935. In the USSR the Union of Evangelical Christians, following a brief period of relative religious freedom in the 1920s, was reduced to a precarious existence in the 1930s by the Stalinist government, and then forced to unite into one church with the Baptists and other smaller Protestant denominations in 1944.\(^7\)

Outside the USSR Evangelical Christians endured for many decades following the Russian Revolution as a separate brotherhood of unions and churches with their own organizational and theological principles and a distinct understanding of their mission. Wherever they were found, an ethnic component was of crucial importance for Slavic Evangelical Christians. This included, but was not limited to, using heritage languages in the meeting, and a special dedication to missionary and relief work among Slavic peoples in the diaspora and in the old country. Theological principles of Slavic Evangelical

\(^4\) This name derives from the German word *Stunde* – “the [prayer] hour.” First Ukrainian Evangelicals either attended German prayer meetings in nearby colonies or modeled their own meetings after the German example.
\(^5\) On the genesis of the three movements see, for example, the excellent dissertation by Samuel John Nesdoly, “Evangelical Sectarianism in Russia” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 1971).
Christians included baptism of believing adults, strictly Arminian theology, and a rather informal leadership pattern. At the same time Slavic Evangelical Christians upheld such basic Protestant teachings as the principle of *sola Scriptura*, priesthood of all believers, salvation through faith by grace, and a simple worship devoid of imagery and elaborate ceremonies.

Ivan Prokhanov led the Union of Evangelical Christians both in and outside of Russia (and later USSR) from 1908 till his death in 1935. During this time he enjoyed unrivalled authority among the members of the movement he led. His personality was singular, his scope of activities highly impressive, and his talents multifaceted. This, however, naturally raises the question to what extent the messianic vision for the Slavic Evangelical Union and far-fetching hopes expressed by Prokhanov were shared or understood by rank and file members of his community. To find a plausible answer to the latter question is important in order to establish whether the difference between Slavic Evangelical Christians and other Protestants, particularly Slavic and non-Slavic Baptists lies in comparatively minor theological and organizational details, in the distinct church philosophy and vision, or in the authoritarian and charismatic ambitions of Ivan Prokhanov.

This thesis intends to prove that Evangelical Christians had their very own, unique vision of their role in Russian and world Christianity that differed on some important points from the Baptists who were a local branch of the greater Baptist family of churches. Many Baptists, especially outside Russia, perceived the Union of Evangelical Christians as another stream of the Baptist movement. Indeed, Ivan Prokhanov was elected (in absentia) Vice-President of the newly established Baptist
World Alliance (BWA) in 1911 and remained in that position until 1928. Representatives of the Evangelical Christians regularly participated in BWA activities. At the same time Prokhanov and other leaders of Evangelical Christians had similar contacts with other evangelical Christian churches in the West, such as the Disciples of Christ, always maintaining the organizational independence and an essentially interdenominational character of their brotherhood.

Appreciation of the following facts will help to better explain the difference between Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians than purely theological (relatively minor) disagreements or the controversial personality of Prokhanov. Evangelical Christians refrained from a direct affiliation with Western Protestant churches even after Prokhanov’s death in 1935. Evangelical Christians in the diaspora have acquired characteristics of an ethno-confessional community. The Union of Evangelical Christians maintained officially, even in the midst of a demographic and ideological crisis, as late as 1980s, a self image of their movement as a seed of a worldwide fellowship of Evangelical Christians, and as a ferment of a more successful and complete worldwide Reformation. Finally, Evangelical Christians were decidedly non-sectarian and extraordinarily open to interdenominational co-operation.

The idea of deepening the Reformation and reaching beyond its historic achievements is not original per se. In the European context Pietists promoted similar goals of Christian unity and a renewed Christian commitment since late 17th century. “The renewal of doctrine achieved in the sixteenth century would be completed by a

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8 Liudvig Shenderovskii, Evangel’kie Khristiane. Vozrozhdennoe evangelskoe dvizhenie v istoricheskoi khristianskoj tserkvi (Evangelical Christians. The Re-born Evangelical Movement Within the Historical Christian Church) (Toronto: Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians, 1980), 393-94.
renewal of life marked by Christian unity and brotherly love." However, the ideas of a more complete Reformation, championed by the Evangelical Christian movement, were new within the Russian context.

Normally movements of a messianic nature that declare far-reaching goals tend to enter a phase of decline following their evident failure to fulfill or live up to their declared aims. Sooner or later they faced what Joseph Zygmunt defined as “ideological crisis born of prophetic failure.” It is hard to resist a temptation to equate the death of Prokhanov with the ideological crisis. However, in spite of the enormous significance of his personality for the movement at large, the decline of a worldwide numerous and dynamic community cannot be sufficiently explained with that fact alone. Rather, it was only one of the factors that chronologically preceded other important events such as the merger of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR in 1944, annexation of Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia by the USSR in 1939 and the establishment of Communist regimes in most of post-war Eastern and Central Europe. These events destroyed the Slavic Evangelical community network in that part of the world, and produced a transnational effect on Slavic Evangelical communities, affecting negatively the vitality of the communities physically distant from the epicentre. Further, Slavic Evangelical Christians in the diaspora were devoid of their main and natural support base in Russia and Ukraine due to the political realities of the Iron Curtain epoch. They also lacked the support of Western Christians because of the non-affiliated denominational status of Slavic Evangelicals, which set them apart from otherwise theologically very

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similar North American or European Baptist churches. This, as the present thesis will 
argue, was one of the main reasons of the weakening and dwindling of the Slavic 
Evangelical movement outside Russia or the former USSR, while such factors as 
assimilation or the loss of a heritage language were external indicators of what can in a 
sense be called the effect of a failed prophecy.

Prokhanov projected the movement he headed as a dawn of a new, more complete 
Reformation, which would begin from Russia or Slavic people in the diaspora, and 
spread globally, uniting Christians, and converting the unsaved. Russia remained almost 
completely untouched by the European Reformation of the 16th century. This does not 
mean, however, that the idea of a Reformation is foreign to Russian religious thought. 
Sergei Zhuk called Russian 19th century radical religious dissent (of which he considered 
Stundists a part) “Russia’s lost Reformation.” Although we strongly disagree with him 
on the heavy emphasis he placed on the communities of the “Israelites” (or shaloputy) as 
a main ferment of this lost Reformation, the underlying notion of both reform as a 
concept and the Reformation as a historical phenomenon was the moving force behind 
the Slavic Evangelical movement. Charles Taylor aptly demonstrated and analysed the 
crucial significance of the inherent need for a reform as an integral part of the process of 
secularization. He wrote: “An age or society would then be secular or not, in virtue of the

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11 See Ivan Prokhanoff, In the Cauldron of Russia 1869-1933. Autobiography of I.S. Prokhanoff (New 
York: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 1933), 254-255: “Reformers who arose at the end of the 
Middle Ages strove mightily to re-create among their people the original pattern of the Christian Church… 
Unfortunately the churches of the Reformation came to a dead stop all too soon… The All-Russian Union 
of Evangelical Christians conceives its mission and task to be the re-creation of early Christianity upon 
earth in all its creative power, and, closely associated with this, the spiritual and moral rebirth of the 
individual, of the family, of society, of the people, and of all mankind.”

12 See Sergei Zhuk, Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern 
Russia and Ukraine, 1830-1917 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual." Religion first became the matter of a free choice in Russia only in 1905. Of course, the October Manifesto promulgated in that year\textsuperscript{14} was not the beginning of the secularization process, but it was an indicator of the preparedness of the Russian society as a whole, “to be aware that there is more than one option [of religion and attitude towards religion].”\textsuperscript{15} The official recognition of this fact was a product of a long history of complex religious and political developments in Russia at the turn of the century. This tacit and continuous process, this dawn of “a secular age” in Russia bears, in our opinion, certain resemblance (if not in form, then in spirit) to the European Protestant Reformation. Evangelical Christians were among the most active and dedicated partakers of this process.

Slavic Evangelical Christians were also an integral, albeit tiny, part of the overall experience of Canadian Protestantism and, particularly, evangelicalism. Recent studies of Canadian evangelicals indicated that immigrant, “ethnic” churches were a significant aspect of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Canadian evangelicalism.\textsuperscript{16} In its development, the Canadian branch of Slavic Evangelical Christians generally followed the pattern, common for other evangelicals in the country. Parallel developments included the Bible school movement, especially in the Prairies, transdenominational awareness and joint initiatives in the sphere of home and foreign mission, Christian radio broadcasting, and a peak of membership and church activities in the 1940s and 1950s.

\textsuperscript{15} Charles Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age}, 12.
\textsuperscript{16} Bruce L. Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada” in \textit{Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada}, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 369-70.
A Case Study: The Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians in Benito, Manitoba

The thesis is focused upon a particular group of Evangelical Christians in Canada, the Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical Church in the village of Benito, Manitoba. It is distinctive and unique for a variety of reasons. First of all, as an immigrant group, its members, along with a sense of identity derived from their religion, were distinct from the majority of Canadians ethnically, culturally, and linguistically. Second, it is remarkable because members of the Benito church were not only a minority compared to the population around them, they were a minority within their own respective larger ethnic groups, for the vast majority of Russian Canadians at the time the church was organized were either Doukhobor or Russian Orthodox, and the bulk of Ukrainian Canadians were either Ukrainian Orthodox or Ukrainian Catholic. Third, the Benito church was unique in the sense that it was a joint church home for a few Slavic ethnicities (along with Ukrainians and Russians there were Belorussians), which is quite atypical for Slavic diasporas, especially in Canada. Usually, in spite of obvious linguistic and cultural affinity, each ethnicity tends to build its own cultural, educational and religious institutions which we can observe in Canada. Therefore, the people who were part of the Benito church were an ethno-religious group, who, similar to Mennonites, “possessed both a religious and an ethnic identity.” Finally, the Benito church is unique case study because this remote rural community was once one of the largest Slavic Evangelical churches in Canada, both in terms of membership and in terms of influence. At the peak,

17 Royden Loewen, “Ethnicity and Religion among Canada’s Mennonites” in Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada, 331.
in the 1950s its activities included radio broadcasting, a Bible Institute, and regular evangelization events in the district and beyond.

Canada, particularly its Prairie Provinces, was among the most popular immigration destinations for Slavic Evangelical Christians in the first half of the 20th century. Most Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada were ethnic Ukrainians. Of course, Ukrainian Evangelical Christians comprised only a tiny portion of all Canadian Ukrainians, and even a small minority among Canadian Ukrainian Protestants. However, a unique feature of these Evangelical Christians was that they preferred a broad identification with the Slavic (or, often, Russian-Ukrainian) community to an exclusively Ukrainian self-identification. The present thesis will demonstrate that the movement of Evangelical Christians has been an outstanding example of intentional, voluntary, peaceful, productive and long-lasting co-operation between Ukrainians and Russians in Canada untouched by political agendas and nationalism.

Comparative study of different immigrant religious groups, according to Royden Loewen, “illuminates characteristics shared by all farm immigrant groups.” Yet, as he further notices, “such studies are rare.” The case of the Slavic Evangelical believers in the Prairie Provinces as a whole, and that of the Benito congregation in particular, presents a perfect opportunity to compare them to their neighbours in order to “understand the dynamic exchange between inherited immigrant cultures and the new social realities associated with modernization.”

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19 Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 91.
Purpose and Arguments

One of the purposes of the research is to establish Slavic Evangelical immigration as a separate instance of religious immigration into Canada along with such groups as Hutterites, Mennonites, and Doukhobors. Its size (over 10,000 members Canada wide during its peak in 1945-55) also allows us to consider it among mentioned three communities. The three groups are widely recognized in the scholarship and in public opinion as important streams of religiously motivated early settlers that helped to shape the cultural and religious mosaic of Western Canada. This thesis argues that Slavic Evangelicals are another group of essentially the same sort. What certainly makes Evangelicals distinct (and less known) as compared to the three mentioned groups (especially Doukhobors and Hutterites) is a lack of conflict associated with their immigration, resettlement and life in Canada.

In regards to the Benito Russian-Ukrainian church in particular, this thesis argues that the choice to identify with the Slavic Evangelical movement and employ the term “Russian-Ukrainian” as the official name of the church had a deep significance. This, in fact, pointed to a historical, cultural, and spiritual bond between the members, ethnic Ukrainians and Polish nationals, and the Evangelical movement, which emerged in Saint-Petersburg in 1860s, and spread throughout the Empire, absorbing and uniting smaller currents of religious dissent on East Slavic lands. In other words, the main reason for the inclusion of the word “Russian” in the name of the church did not refer to the ethnicity, for Ukrainians comprised the absolute majority of the membership of the church at any given time in its history, but, rather, underlined its historical and spiritual lineage. In fact, the worldwide movement of which the Benito church was a part have used “The World
Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians” as their official name. Therefore, instead of employing such narrow ethnic qualifiers as Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, or “Russian-Ukrainian,” Slavic Evangelical Christians will be generally used in this thesis in reference to the wider movement and to the members of the Benito church both as a religious and an ethnic designation. A special mention must be made on the difference between the capital “E” Evangelical Christians, used in this research as a proper name of the movement, and small “e” evangelicals, denoting a broader transnational strand in Christianity, of which Slavic Evangelical Christians were a part.20

This thesis will examine ways of integration of Slavic Evangelicals into Canadian society, and the reasons why the process of integration was so much smoother than that of Anabaptist (Mennonite and Hutterite) communities and, particularly, the Doukhobors. This work will be dealing with how the place and stance of Slavic Evangelicals were negotiated both within the Canadian society at large and within larger Ukrainian and Russian communities in Canada. The movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians fitted well into the Canadian evangelical mainstream, which facilitated the integration of the community into Canadian life, and, conversely, contributed to a decline of the movement as a distinct ethno-religious group.21

Slavic Evangelical Christians may be regarded within the broader context of eastern European, Slavic, Ukrainian or Russian immigration into Canada. Nevertheless,

20 For the purposes of this research the “quadruple” definition of evangelicalism suggested by David Bebbington, is used. See David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-3. According to Bebbington, evangelicalism rests upon conversionism, Biblicism, activism, and crucicentrism. The position of Slavic Evangelicals in relation to North American evangelicalism will be considered in detail in Chapter VII.

21 Compare with Mennonite Brethren and their accelerated acculturation under the influence of evangelicalism, see Bruce Guenther, “Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites” in Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 229-231.
their distinct identity was rooted in religion, and their migratory experiences were, thus, significantly influenced by religious ideas. These experiences for Slavic Evangelical Christians were, in a sense, a pursuit of New Jerusalem, understood broadly as a search for a physical location where Christian religious ideals converge with political reality. Many of them saw in their new country a realization of a desire for a “godly” political order, where their religious beliefs were no longer a pretext for mistreatment or discrimination. They saw their newly found liberty and prosperity, in religious terms, as a gift from God. At the same time, the very process of seeking out the land of freedom (which for some of the settlers turned to be a thorny path) was akin to the biblical wandering in search of a heavenly city.

This thesis is also an attempt to document and preserve the history, memoirs and cultural heritage of the Benito Evangelical Church and its members. The present research will contribute a new element to the spectrum of the Canadian multicultural society. The unique culture of Slavic Evangelical immigrants in a backwater district of Manitoba is nearly extinct now, and it may be completely gone if not preserved and documented promptly.

A Note on Transliteration of Personal and Geographical Names

Transliteration of Ukrainian and Russian personal names, geographical names, titles of books and periodicals with the exception of the most commonly used ones (Moscow, Kiev, Belorussia etc.) usually follows ALA-LC Romanization tables approved

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by the Library of Congress and the American Library Association.\textsuperscript{23} In rare cases more than one spelling of the same name may be used if sources provide different variants of spelling. For example, the same last name may be spelled either as Guk based upon its pronunciation in Russian, or as Huk, since some of the written sources reflect the Ukrainian/Belorussian pronunciation. The last name Prokhanov (Rus. Проханов) is spelled Prokhanoff in all footnote references to Prokhanov’s \textit{Autobiography}, because it appeared with a double “f” on that publication in English.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts} (Library of Congress, 1997).
Chapter I. Literature, Sources, and Methodology

The movement of Evangelical Christians emerged in the 1870s in north-western Russia, particularly in St. Petersburg under the direct influence of Western preachers. However, in all probability communities of Bible-based believers that identified themselves as Evangelical Christians, but not linked directly to the Saint-Petersburg centre existed in various parts of the country even prior to the 1870s. The Union of Evangelical Christians was formally established by their prominent leader Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov in 1909. Later it spread throughout Russia, and gained a large number of converts in what was then the Russian part of Poland (presently the eastern part of Poland, Western Belorussia, and Western Ukraine), mostly ethnic East Slavs (Ukrainians and Belorussians). The latter, due to mass immigration, comprised the bulk of Slavic Evangelical settlers in Canada in the first half of the 20th century.

Consequently, the literature about the Evangelical movement was written in various languages, and bears traces of diverse influences. Much of the literature used for this research was written in the Russian language. However, due to the numerical significance and, in some cases (e.g. Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada) prevalence of ethnic Ukrainians, books, articles and other pieces in the Ukrainian language were of high importance. A high degree of attention paid to the emerging Russian Evangelical movement by European (especially British and German) and North American Protestants led to the appearance of various books on Russian Evangelicals in English and German from as early as 1900s. This acute interest continued into the post-Revolutionary years,

1 See, for example, Serge Bolshakoff, Russian Nonconformity: The Story of Unofficial Religion in Russia (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 111.
with an added political anti-Communist aspect. A significant part of the literature discussed below can be classified as either outright confessional, usually written by Russian, Ukrainian and Western Protestants, or confessionally biased. Political agendas and their influence on the subject of this research is another problem this chapter will deal with. Finally, we will discuss the use of oral history, and other sources, such as visual ones.

**Evangelical Christians in the Scholarly Discourse and Confessional Literature**

Being a movement of Western origin, supported and nurtured by kindred religious groups in North America, Great Britain, Germany, and elsewhere, Slavic Protestantism (comprised mostly, though not exclusively, by Baptists and Evangelical Christians) enjoyed a considerable degree of attention in the West. Although most of the earliest (before the Russian Revolution of 1917) books on the subject were written from the confessional viewpoint, they represent an important source of information about the early period of the movement. A notable fact to consider as we start reviewing English language literature is that most of it was penned by Baptist authors. These latter usually considered Evangelical Christians as part of the Baptist movement, and were not particularly interested in understanding the difference between the two branches. Later, in the diaspora, Slavic Evangelicals, unlike Baptists, have always remained an ethnic church which left them somewhat marginalised in the West as compared with their Baptist counterparts and resulted in their being ignored as a separate group in the public and scholarly discourse.
A British author Robert Sloan Latimer wrote extensively on the subject in 1908 to 1910. His *Dr. Baedecker and His Apostolic Work in Russia, Under Three Tsars, and With Christ in Russia* discussed “the historical genesis and the extensive sweep of the present most interesting movement [Evangelical awakening in Russia] in the religious life of this great people” as well as “scenes that took place under my own eyes.” Latimer’s work is a good example of the high quality confessional literature about emerging Russian Evangelicalism and attests to the interest Western Baptists took in it. Another Baptist author who likewise was a witness of the growing Evangelical movement in Russia was Charles T. Byford, who served as a Continental Commissioner of the Baptist World Alliance in the first decade of the 20th century. His *Peasants and Prophets* is devoted to native Baptist pioneers in Russia and south-eastern Europe (Hungary, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria). These two authors genuinely endeavoured to be objective, but their stance was clearly denominational. Byford viewed Evangelical Christians as “free Baptists.” A more academic approach to the subject was undertaken by Rev. James Henry Rushbrooke, a British writer, pastor, and the President of the World Baptist Alliance in 1939-1947, who devoted much effort to post-WWI relief work. His *Some Chapters of European Baptist History* allocated a chapter to the Baptists in Russia and the USSR. Rushbrooke recognized the Evangelical Christians as an “independent movement,” that gradually became “Baptist in doctrine and polity,” in spite of a separate leadership and

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organization. For Rushbrooke, Prokhanov was a highly gifted, but, perhaps, too self-centred personality. From this perspective, Prokhanov’s position as Vice-President within the Baptist World Alliance from 1911 to 1928 could be regarded as an advance made to Prokhanov in the hope that he would join forces with the Russian Baptists. All three authors (as nearly all other Baptist authors who touched on the subject) regarded Evangelical Christians as merely a branch of the Baptists.

Post-revolutionary Western literature on the subject was often devoted to the fate of Christianity, including its Protestant branches, in the Soviet state with its officially atheistic ideology. Denominational literature, both academic and popular, from that time on and for many decades to come almost entirely concentrated upon stories of persecution or mistreatment of believers in the USSR, humanitarian concerns, human rights activism, in some cases efforts to facilitate emigration of Protestant believers from the USSR. Taking into account the isolation of the USSR from the Western world and the political climate of the time, the whole subject of Soviet Christians soon became highly mythologized. Touching and romantic stories about brave martyrs for their faith and strong fighters for Christ against the “diabolically evil” state served the psychological needs of Western believers. The latter could feel proud of partaking (by praying, donating, signing petitions etc.) in the right cause, and had their own faith reaffirmed by knowing that Christians were suffering at the hands of the godless somewhere in a vast far-away land. Using the situation with religious freedom in the USSR (which, of course, had been far from satisfactory for the most of the Soviet period) as a political gun on the battlefields of the Cold War did little service to the objectivity of the treatment of the subject in Western denominational literature of the Soviet period. The level of

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6 Rushbrooke, Some Chapters, 94.
misinterpretation, exaggeration, and personal bias, the amount of improvable, dubious facts, and outright fake stories in the denominational non-academic Western literature on Soviet Evangelicals was so high that, in spite of its tremendous volume, this sort of literature is of very little use for this research.7

Academic literature on Russian and Soviet Evangelicals of the period frequently suffered the handicap of being too speculative. Due to the governmental restrictions and the political isolation of the USSR, scholars did not have the opportunity to conduct archival research or field work in the USSR. Therefore, scholars often needed to depend upon outdated information or communication that was hard to verify. For instance, Michael Bourdeaux in his *Religious Ferment in Russia*8 acknowledged that he could not vouch for the accuracy of numerous passages of his book, and suggested that certain documents might be deemed genuine since “the authenticity of no single one has… ever been challenged by the Soviet authorities.”9 The latter statement leaves a reader wondering whether the author is serious in taking the judgement of Soviet authorities on religious issues (or the lack thereof) as a proof of authenticity. Political agendas also claimed their toll on the scholarship of the period, and in some cases scholarship and politics became very closely intertwined with one another. The activities of the famous Keston Institute, a UK-based centre for the study of religion in the “Communist lands”

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7 For instance, the story of Sergei Kourdakov, a Soviet seaman granted political asylum in Canada in 1971, who claimed to have been a former persecutor of underground believers turned Christian, was investigated by a US Christian activist and educator Caroline Walker. Initially Walker tried to find additional information on Sergei Kourdakov whom he had admired as a hero of faith, and other characters of Kourdakov’s book *The Persecutor* (Fleming H. Ravel Company, 1973). Contrary to her expectations, she found out that much of Kourdakov’s story was false. In 2004 Walker produced a documentary *Forgive Me, Sergei* ([http://www.forgivemesergei.com](http://www.forgivemesergei.com), URL valid as of June 24, 2010).
are a good example of the latter. Bourdeaux in his *Opium of the People* describes in detail how vicious the Soviet regime was and how it set out from the very beginning to destroy religion. Unprecedented for Evangelicals, religious liberties granted by the Lenin’s government after the Revolution that lasted for about a decade, apparently did not fit the story and were left out of the narrative. Bourdeaux wrote that “the amazing thing was that he [leader of Evangelical Christians Ivan Prokhanov] persuaded the Communist authorities to let him found Evangel’sk [The City of Gospel, an intentional religious commune]… Prokhanov’s project was to make his first commune a Christian model which the rest of the Soviet Union would wish to follow.” It sounds as if the Prokhanov’s project were something unique and outstanding, while in the 1920s in the USSR, hundreds of Christian communal projects, farms, and settlements existed legally throughout the country. Representatives of the Soviet authorities even participated in the inauguration ceremony of the City of Gospel. The question remains whether the author was not aware of such a basic fact or chose to omit it intentionally. The Keston Institute has produced a tremendous corpus of publications on Protestants in Russia. However, in spite of its rich informative basis, this sort of literature has to be used with extreme caution due to its obvious political bias. A useful piece of advice was given by Walter Sawatsky: “one of the rules of thumb followed by respected scholars… was to compare sources - official, samizdat, western reports - and to generate the most plausible account,

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10 The official website of the Keston Institute is available at the following address: [http://www.keston.org.uk/index.php](http://www.keston.org.uk/index.php) (URL accurate as of June 14, 2009).
12 Bourdeaux, *Opium of the People*, 152.
thereby also learning to differentiate more reliable scholarship… from the outright
tendentious.”

Another type of a confessional history is what we can safely call the official
history of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR (and modern Russia). As was
mentioned, both denominations were made to unite in 1944 by the Stalinist government.
Some leaders of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists were even returned from exile or
released from prisons or labour camps to be able to participate in a unification congress.
The government apparently found it easier to keep one recognized large Evangelical
union under surveillance than two separate brotherhoods or a number of illegal
independent groups or small denominations. Besides, the Soviet government of the time
strove to demonstrate to the world, including its war-time allies, that religious freedoms
were honoured in the USSR. Consequently, the official viewpoint of the All-Union
Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB) founded in 1944 has been that
two branches had always sought to unite, and that the unification act of 1944 was a
providential event that brought the unification dream to its fulfillment. An example of the
history supporting this view is Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR (The
History of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the USSR) published in 1989 by the
AUCECB.

In contrast is the autobiography by Ivan Prokhanov entitled In the Cauldron of
Russia (V russkom kotle). The book, published in English in 1933 in New York, is a
powerful example of a spiritual autobiography and an important historical testimony on

the Evangelical movement both in Russia and beyond. However, from the vantage point of the present research the most remarkable facts are the following. Baptists and the Russian Baptist Union were hardly at all mentioned in the autobiography. This calls for an explanation, since Prokhanov had been Vice-President of the World Baptist Alliance from 1911 to 1928. Prokhanov described in detail his vision for the Evangelical movement, its role within the worldwide Christendom, emphasized the spirit of co-operation between Christians everywhere in spite of their denomination.

The reluctance on behalf of Prokhanov to acknowledge his involvement with the Baptists church in Russia and internationally has two plausible (and overlapping) explanations. On one hand, this may be interpreted as a reflection of Prokhanov’s own strong-willed and self-centred personality, intolerant to the leadership (or competition) of others. Since Prokhanov staked on his own independent union, where he was the unquestionable head, it could have been in his best interest to conceal or downplay his own Baptist past and his long-standing relationship with the Baptists. On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that this position suggests that Prokhanov’s involvement with the Baptists was no more than an expression of an interdenominational character of the Slavic Evangelical movement, and that Prokhanov saw it that way. Indeed, as we shall see, the Prokhanovite church simultaneously sought and welcomed co-operation and involvement with denominations other than Baptists, such as the Disciples of Christ, the fact not reflected in his Autobiography, either.

This identifies a crucial point in the scholarship on the Baptists and Evangelicals Christians, namely, the question whether the two branches should be classified as one denomination or not, and, if not, what the difference between them was. Andrew Blane, a
U.S. scholar and the author of a number of publications on Russian religiosity, argued that “although a complex of… factors frustrated organic union of the two major divisions of the Protestant sects [Baptists and Evangelical Christians in Russia], it is still sound to view them as a single movement.”17 It may be plausible to consider them as a single body considering the later history of the two movements in the USSR where they eventually merged into one denomination and generally have endured as a united religious body until now.18 However it is less plausible from the vantage point of this research, which covers the Evangelical Christians in the diaspora. According to Blane, one can consider both groups as one because, firstly because “The Baptist World Alliance… recognized them as one,” and, secondly, “most significant of all, the Tsarist government considered them to be a single movement and treated them accordingly.”19 The Baptist World Alliance was only formed in 1903 as a broad umbrella organization, and, apparently, was primarily concerned with supporting believers in Russia under its aegis, rather than with discerning who within emerging Russian Protestantism represented which denomination and why. Steve Durasoff, an émigré Russian religious historian, who authored a number of publications on Pentecostalism, and was a Pentecostal believer himself, wrote in his The Russian Protestants, that “Rushbrooke, one of the presidents of the World Baptist Alliance declared that both Russian unions were known abroad as Baptists; the difference of names was attributed to their independent origins.”20 Even though Baptists abroad might have disregarded the difference between the two unions, the “independent origins”

18 The Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians was resurrected in 1992 at a Conference in Moscow. Yet, most local churches preferred to remain within the Evangelical-Baptist Union.
19 Blane, Protestant Sects, 293.
was an important enough issue. Further, the two branches not only originated independently, but existed independently until 1944 in the USSR, and until, at least, early 21st century outside the USSR. We need to remember, though, that from the point of view of Prokhanov, with his openness towards like-minded believers, his participation in the major Christian conference with unity and co-operation on its agenda made perfect sense and did not necessarily imply that he considered himself a Baptist.

The fact that the Tsarist government treated Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians as one body does not mean much. The government (and the dominant Orthodox church) was only interested in either suppressing “sectarians” or keeping them under control, and not in an academic study of religious dissent and its proper classification. It is enough to mention that the derogatory name of *khlysty* (Flagellants, members of the old Russian clandestine ecstatic sect that emerged in 17th century) was indiscriminately applied both by Tsarist and church officials to any dissent movement with a charismatic component. This was done in order to accuse religious dissidents of sexual indecency and horrific worship practices (such as self-flagellation and human sacrifices) that were traditionally ascribed to the *khlysty*.21 Even when attempts to classify “sects” were earnest and genuinely objective, they rarely went far beyond a mechanistic and simplistic division based upon externals, such as “mystical” and “rationalist” sects.22

It should be noted, though, that Western scholars of the period who wrote about religious dissent in Russia, often did not fare any better. For example, Frederick Connybeare in his

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22 A good example of such rather meaningless classification is otherwise very informative *Obzor russkih sekty i ikh tolkov* (*A Review of Russian Sects and Their Branches*) by a professor of Orthodox theology and protopriest Timofei Butkevich (Kharkov: Tipografiia gubernskago pravleniia, 1910).
once classical *Russian Dissenters*, divided sects into 1) the Old Believers of Great Russia, 2) the Spiritual Christians of South Russia (including Baptists!), and 3) the Mystics. Connybeare, who wrote his book from 1914 to 1917, when Evangelical Protestants already were one of the biggest sectarian movements in the country, devoted little space to Russian Protestants and did not classify them as a separate branch of religious dissent at all! No wonder that he did not even mention Evangelical Christians.

Thus, in order to understand if, where, and to what extent Baptists were similar to or different from Evangelical Christians, one should be very careful when taking into account preconceived views and traditional myths, whether they were produced or upheld by the Tsarist Russian government, the World Baptist Alliance, or the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB).

Another important, albeit somewhat outdated, authority on the Russian nonconformity, the émigré Russian scholar Serge Bolshakoff, got much closer to the point. He pointed out that “Prokhanov did not wish to work in the Russian Baptist Union. He believed that their very name, Baptists, was alien to the Russian people. Besides, Prokhanov was unable to accept the rigid views of the Russian Baptists. In that he was very similar to Vladimir Soloviev, who, although nominally a Roman Catholic *was in reality an independent thinker*… Prokhanov and Soloviev, Russian Protestant and Russian Catholic, were *very unlike their Western coreligionists and were in a way heretical.*” Both men met, and personal relationship between Prokhanov and Soloviev is an interesting topic in itself.

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Some of the authors of the period testified to substantial distinctions between two major branches of Protestantism in Russia. An Orthodox archpriest and anti-sectarian missionary A. Iunitskii, mentioned in 1895 that in 1880s Baptists of the city of Baku had an active correspondence with Pashkov, an early leader of Evangelical Christians in St. Petersburg, and predecessor of Ivan Prokhanov. The correspondence ended up in a disagreement between Pashkov and the Baptists over the question of open (upheld by Evangelical Christians) versus closed (practised by Baptists) communion. Both facts, the existence of an active contact, and its final failure are eloquent enough and, in our opinion, represent graphically the dialectics of the relationship between Slavic Baptists and Evangelical Christians.

Paul Steeves, the author of a 1976 dissertation on the Russian Baptist Union, and a scholar of Russian religion, followed suit in considering the Evangelical Christians as a side branch of the broader Baptist movement. His more recent scholarship seems to hold to the same position. For instance, within the context of the military draft issue and Russian Baptists in 1920s Evangelical Christians were referred to only once as a "kindred-spirited Union of Evangelical Christians."

One of the most thoroughly researched books on the Slavic Evangelical movement to date is Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion (Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union) by the German church

26 A. Iunitskii, “Sektantskie gnizda na Kavkaze (Sectarian Nests in the Caucasus),” Khristianskoe Chtenie Vol 1 (1895), 158.
historian Wilhelm Kahle. The book, however, focused upon the figure and personality of Ivan Prokhanov and his influence on the Evangelical Christians, and did not examine the Slavic Evangelical movement beyond Prokhanov’s death. Kahle pointed to the virtual impossibility of any union between Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians while Prokhanov with his charisma and strong leadership was the head of the latter. Kahle also emphasised on the importance of the heritage of the Molokans and other Spiritual Christians for Prokhanov and his followers.

Walter Sawatsky, reviewing the history of the Russian Evangelicals, pointed out that “due to the influence of the Plymouth Brethren, the Pashkovites [predecessors of Prokhanov and his Union] did not ordain leaders, baptize, or maintain membership rolls,”30 differences that went far beyond closed or open communion, and would represent a tangible barrier between Baptists and the Pashkovites. To this one can add that this attitude towards externals was characteristic not only of the Plymouth Brethren, but also of Russian Spiritual Christians, Molokans and Doukhobors. Sawatsky was very accurate in describing the history of unification attempts of Baptists and Evangelical Christians as quite complicated. He specifically indicated that Baptists were the ones who took a more inflexible stance in the unification negotiations than the Evangelical Christians.

Heather Coleman, a Canadian researcher of Russian Baptists, continues in the tradition of Andrew Blane and others who preferred to consider Evangelical Christians as “the other branch of the movement.”31 What is truly important and relevant for the present research is Coleman’s evaluation of the Baptist and Evangelical Christian

30 Walter Sawatsky, Soviet Evangelicals, 34.
movement at the end of the 19th and first quarter of the 20th century as “the Spiritual Revolution.” Here we come very close to whence the inner strength of the movement came. In the words of Charles Taylor, “this drive to Reform was the matrix out of which the modern European idea of Revolution emerges.”32 We argue that one of the keys to the correct understanding of Evangelical Christians is their commitment to comprehensive reform (and Reformation) in Russia and worldwide, first spiritual, and then social, economical, and political.

Yurii Reshetnikov, a Ukrainian scholar, and an active member of the Evangelical-Baptist church, produced in 2000 a dissertation on the Evangelical and Baptist movement in Ukraine. The dissertation was widely based upon archival documents and pieces of oral history. His stance on the problem of the differentiation between Baptists and Evangelical Christians is very simplistic. He believes that the main (if not the only) difference between the former and the latter was that Baptists followed the teaching of Particular Baptists on predestination, while Evangelical Christians adopted the Arminian doctrine of the General Baptists.33 Even though this observation may be true, we intend to show that the distinctions went far beyond this specific doctrinal issue, and had a more fundamental character.

Tat’iana Nikol’skaia authored a comprehensive review of Russian Protestantism in relation to the state from the enactment of religious toleration policy in the Russian Empire in 1905 until the end of the Soviet period in 1991.34 The book by Nikol’skaia is,

33 Yurii Evhenovych Reshetnikov, Stanovlennia ta diferentsiatsiia evanhel’ko rukhu v Ukraini (The Emergence and Differentiation of the Evangelical Movement in Ukraine) (Candidate of Sciences diss., G.S. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, 2000), Chapter 3.2.
undoubtedly, one of the most comprehensive academic studies on the topic. Her book is devoted to the “traditional” branches of the Russian Protestantism, which include Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day Adventists. Nikol’skaia did not specifically address the issue of the relationship between Evangelical Christians and Baptists, but in her analysis, which sequentially looked at one Protestant branch after another, she consistently treated Evangelical Christians and Baptists as two distinct denominations until their unification in 1944. She admitted that their fusion in 1944 was achieved in defiance of the very basic principles of congregational democracy and accountability common for both branches, and under the tight control of the Soviet authorities.\(^{35}\) She explained the perseverance of the union thereafter pointing to the “doctrinal closeness” of both movements, and, most importantly, to their “moral preparedness” to unite in the 1940s, after “the change of generations”. Apparently, moral preparedness paved the road to a durable unification in the USSR, where both churches were weakened and intimidated by the Stalinist terror. At the same time, the church of Slavic Evangelical Christians outside the USSR, which developed under different social and political circumstances, endured as a separate denomination at least until the early 21\(^{st}\) century.

Now, it is impossible to deny the great degree of similarity, both theological and practical, between Slavic Baptists and Evangelical Christians. The continuous cooperation between Evangelical Christians and Baptists even when they represented two separate denominations is also beyond any doubt. Finally, the church of Evangelical Christian-Baptists would not have been a viable union if the difference between its two main branches had been insuperable. Yet, to realize this difference, its reasons and

\(^{35}\) Nikol’skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 139.
consequences for both denominations, is the key point to understanding the fate of the Slavic Evangelic movement globally, including on the Canadian Prairies.

Sources and Literature on Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada

Works on the history of the Baptist church in Canada sometimes cover “ethnic” Baptist churches. For instance, Joseph Harris in his historical essay on Western Canadian Baptists dedicated to the centennial anniversary of Baptist beginnings in the region devoted a chapter to “ethnic churches.” One section of the chapter (only a few pages long) told the story of Ukrainian Baptists in the Prairie Provinces. It is worth noting that Harris mentioned “a few Russian Baptists known as Stundists” who lived in villages or on farms near Dauphin and Emerson in Manitoba even prior to beginning of the mass immigration of Galician (from the Western part of present-day Ukraine) Ukrainians to Canada. Those Stundists provided help to the English-speaking Baptists when the latter decided to make contact with Ukrainian newcomers in order to proselytize among them. It is important to understand that Slavic Baptists in Western Canada, at least in the beginning stage (end of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century) were largely a product of the missionary work under the aegis of local (English-speaking) Baptists. At the same time there were Slavic settlers who came to Canada already being Evangelical believers, often primarily due to religious reasons (persecutions in the home country, to avoid military service, etc.) and maintained independent communities.

Jonathan Kalmakoff, a Regina-based Doukhobor historian, genealogist, and a webmaster of a very informative Doukhobor Genealogy website, authored an article

about the Doukhobor resettlement near the small town of Hyas in Saskatchewan. He said that as of 1904 “other groups [of settlers alongside the Doukhobors] included… Russian and Ukrainian Evangelical Protestants who, like the Doukhobors, fled Tsarist Russia to avoid religious persecution… The two groups of settlers, being able to converse in their native language, remained on friendly terms, visited one another’s homes and engaged in lively philosophical discussions.” In all probability, here Kalmakoff described the people and the milieu that soon was to become the basis for the Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada while the direct mission work of established Baptist churches among Galician newcomers, in turn, provided a basis for the Ukrainian Baptist Unions in Canada. Symptomatically, Kalmakoff, not being involved with the Baptists, did not refer to those “Evangelical Protestants” as Baptists (apparently because there was no evidence that they called themselves that name) while Harris, a Baptist author, named the early “Stundist” settlers Baptists, in the traditional fashion of most Baptist authors, both Western or Russian and Ukrainian.

A chapter in a recent book on Ukrainian and Belorussian peasant migrants in Canada by Vadim Kukushkin is devoted to their religious life. While correctly noting that most immigrants from the Russian Empire came to Canada in search of better life, and not because of persecutions, he mentioned that most early Slavic Baptist preachers in Canada “had been converted to the Baptist faith in the old country and had come to Canada to escape persecution.” According to Kukushkin, Baptists were the only Protestants who were able to gain some following among Slavic immigrants, mainly because immigrants knew who Baptists were prior to their arrival in Canada. The Baptist mission among Slavs in Canada

38 Vadim Kukushkin, From Peasants to Labourers: Ukrainian and Belarusan Immigration from the Russian Empire to Canada (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 152-62.
39 Kukushkin, From Peasants to Labourers, 153.
enjoyed a steady financial and organizational support provided by Anglo-Canadian Baptists, although such support was at times exceedingly paternalistic. Kukushkin was seemingly unaware of Evangelical Christians as a Slavic religious movement distinct from Baptists and independent of aid and control by Anglo-Canadian religious denominations.

It should be noted that the abovementioned History of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the USSR, published by the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists treated Slavic Baptist and Evangelical Christian churches abroad in a concise, but very straightforward manner. The History mentioned in a very positive light the Worldwide Union of Evangelical Christians. It said that “this Union which unites the Slavs… from early 1960s… established and has since maintained the very best relations with the AUCECB.” Of particular interest in this brief description is the recognition of the “Slavic,” that is, essentially inter-ethnic nature of the Union, and an indirect indication of the Union’s political neutrality. One should keep in mind that the early 1960s were marked by the increased intolerance towards religion in the USSR and the split within the AUCECB, when part of the Evangelical-Baptist church in the USSR preferred illegal existence to compliance to the Soviet legislation on religion which the separatist group believed to have been discriminatory.

Unlike their brethren in Russia or the USSR, Slavic Evangelicals or even Baptists in Canada never attracted any noticeable public or scholarly attention. For the general public they were just another immigrant group, while scholars generally did not see them as a significant phenomenon compared to Anabaptist or Doukhobor settlers. Slavic Evangelicals and Baptists in Canada produced some historical literature of their own striving to document their beginnings and history, and to make a statement regarding

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40 The History, 308.
their goals, aspirations, and achievements. One of the earliest such books was *With Christ in America. A Story of Russian-Ukrainian Baptists*[^41] written by Ivan A. Kmeta and published in 1948. Kmeta was a prominent leader of the Slavie Baptist movement in North America. He came to Canada in 1929 and served as a pastor in Manitoba and later in Los Angeles, California. Kmeta came from the Eastern part of Ukraine (Kharkov) and his approach was that of a close co-operation, and, whenever, possible, unity between Slavic believers. We can safely say that Ivan Kmeta represented the traditional “Stundist” standpoint, universalist and non-nationalistic at its core, and firmly rooted in the common experience of spiritual search, awakening, and suffering of Russians, Ukrainians, German Mennonites, and other peoples of the Russian Empire. Kmeta placed a short biography of Prokhanov in his book among life stories of other pioneers of the Russian Protestantism. However, this brief (one page long) biography was very critical. Prokhanov was specifically criticized for his independent stance in relation to the Russian Baptists. Kmeta said, “if he [Prokhanov] had kept the fellowship with the Baptists at home as he did with those abroad [a clear allusion to Prokhanov’s involvement with the in the World Baptist Alliance], perhaps greater things would have happened in that country instead of petty quarrels among believers.”[^42] At the same time a few lines earlier Kmeta tacitly recognized that the vision, goals, plans and, indeed, the very underlying philosophy of Prokhanov’s movement was unique and independent. “Prokhanov… had a great vision for Russia. He dreamed of a reform that has had no precedent in history. He planned a new Evangelical economy, politics, and new Evangelical cities; in general, a new order of

life." Obviously, all this was way too exotic or utopian for the well-established, mainstream North American Baptist church and affiliated with it emerging Slavic Baptist communities.

Another attempt of the same sort was the book by another pioneer of the Slavic Baptist movement in Canada, Petro (Peter) Kindrat. His book was written in the Ukrainian language under the title *Ukrains’kyi baptysts’kyi rukh u Kanadi* (*The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada*) and published in 1972. Kindrat was one of the initiators of a separate Ukrainian Baptist Union in Canada founded in 1921. Characteristically, Kindrat referred to the Slavic Evangelical Union in Canada (of which the Benito church was a part) as the “Russian brotherhood,” although the Union was intentionally multi-ethnic and multi-lingual. Kindrat and his standpoint represented what may be called the ukrainophile approach.

Finally, an influx of politicised post-WWII Ukrainian emigrants and the beginning of the Cold War further influenced the position of some Ukrainian Protestants in Canada. As a result, new Ukrainian Protestant organizations were founded. Some of them exhibited strong political bias and tendencies that can be rightfully called russophobic. Promoters of this position tended to entirely separate the Ukrainian Evangelical movement from the Russian Evangelical movement by re-writing the history to fit their political and nationalistic agenda. For instance, Stephen Nischuk, founder and director of the Ukrainian Baptist Missionary Society of Detroit, Michigan in his pamphlet

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43 Kmeta, *With Christ in America*, 37
Ukrainian Baptist Church⁴⁶ completely ignored the shared history of the Evangelical movement in Russia and Ukraine. Soviet Communists (very many of whom in the USSR were, in fact, Ukrainians) were consistently referred to as “Russian Communists,” and even the Orthodox Church was referred to as “Russian Red Orthodoxy.” Little wonder that the USA, in its turn, was lauded as “our wonderful, great, and free United States of America.” Of course, there has never been any single or united “Ukrainian Baptist Church” as such, and Mr. Nischuk hardly had any right to speak on behalf of all Ukrainian Baptists whose political views varied greatly.

Even academic works on Ukrainian religious history such as The History of Religious Thought in Ukraine by Mykhailo Hrushevsky⁴⁷ displayed this tendency to unceasingly affirm and accentuate differences between Ukraine and “Muscovite” Russia, carefully avoiding any mention of positive, peaceful, or mutually enriching interaction between two branches of the originally united ethnos.

Thus, we can identify three specific approaches towards their own history and roles within the Ukrainian Protestant Canadian community reflected in the literature they have produced. They are 1) traditionalist, which acknowledged shared origins and history with the Russian Protestantism, 2) ukrainophile, which emphasized the Ukrainian ethnic, linguistic and cultural aspects of their movement, and 3) russophobic, extremely politically laden that used their position within Ukrainian Baptist communities as a channel for expressing their political agenda and, often, ethnic prejudice. Among the factors that influenced the viewpoint of a specific author are their birthplace in the

⁴⁶ Stephen Nischuk, Ukrainian Baptist Church (Detroit: The Ukrainian Baptist Mission, 1969).
Ukraine, the period when they left Ukraine, and, of course, their personal story and experiences.

The abovementioned diametrical divergence of opinions is characteristic of Baptist denominational literature. Books, pamphlets, and other writings produced by Evangelical Christians proper (a much smaller corpus of writings) appear to be to a great degree free of nationalistic or political biases. *Evangel’skie Khristiane (Evangelical Christians)*, a historical book by Evangelical pastor Liudvig Shenderovskii, published in Canada in 1980 is, as the author himself noted, the only full and comprehensive story of the Slavic Evangelical movement worldwide up to date. Rev. Shenderovskii was Polish; however he put a special emphasis on reaffirmation of the multi-ethnic character of the Union of Evangelical Christians and firmly stated that “domination of one ethnicity over another was discouraged.” It was published when the overall decline of the movement was already obvious. Naturally, the author could not but offer some kind of an explanation of the failure of the Slavic Evangelical movement. According to Shenderovskii, the main reason was the loss of the heritage languages by second and third generations of the Slavic Evangelicals and the virtual halt of the continuous influx of new Slavic immigrants. As we will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, this explanation is simplistic and, in fact, is a case of a misrepresentation of the cause and effect relationship.

Periodical publications of the Slavic Evangelical Christians of different time periods will provide an additional key to internal processes within the brotherhood, and will allow tracing the dynamics of these processes. Magazine *Khristianin* (The Christian) was published by the Prokhanovite Union of Evangelical Christians from 1906 to 1928 in
Russia and USSR. Prokhanov served as the magazine’s editor-in-chief. The magazine was intended as a tribune for all like-minded Christians regardless of denomination. In 1928 it closed down under the increasing pressure of the Stalinist government. For the purposes of this research, Khristianin is a witness of the condition of Prokhanovite movement at the time just prior to the mass migrations of Evangelical Christians to North America, when the movement was headed by its charismatic leader and still enjoyed the degree of freedom in the USSR. Evangel’skaia vera (The Faith of the Gospel), the official periodical of Evangelical Christians outside the USSR, was published in 1931-1940 first in New York, then in Berlin, and finally, in Tallinn. This periodical was especially valuable for the present research, because it covered the period of the formation of the Slavic Evangelical church in the diaspora, including its Canadian branch, and, specifically, the community in Benito. Another periodical, Evangel’skoe slovo (The Word of Gospel) was published between 1962 and 1975 by the World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians, the heir of the Prokhanovite Union in the diaspora, headquartered in Chicago, USA. This magazine reflects the life of the worldwide brotherhood of Slavic Evangelical Christians during post-war years of peak and decline, when it was managed collegially by elected elders. The readership of Evangel’skoe slovo included Slavic Evangelical Christians from North America to Argentina, Uruguay, and Switzerland. Newspaper and magazine articles and other periodic publications of a non-scholarly nature pertaining to the history of Slavic Evangelicals worldwide will be used as needed.

There is only one book (only 67 pages long) produced by or about that Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical community in Benito. It is a bilingual (English and Ukrainian,
although only a portion of the English text is rendered in the Ukrainian) book The Church in the Valley (Tserkva v seli), designed and written as a collection of memories and old photos, a memorial to the church and its members when the community was in 1985 already on its way to disintegration. As the compiler, Lydia McKinnon, stated, “this book is compiled from the wealth of personal information and photographs contributed by a great many people. Approximately 250 people were contacted; about one-third replied.”

The book, as one could safely assume, was an accurate, but fairly cautious, story of the community, combining genuine heartfelt nostalgia and sympathy for the church and its people with silence about internal conflicts.

Slavic Evangelical immigration into Canada has never been a subject of any consistent scholarly analysis. In part it is due to the fact that Evangelical Ukrainians and Russians in Canada comprise a relatively small faction of Ukrainian Canadians and Russian Canadians. Although there exists a large corpus of academic works on Ukrainian immigration into Canada, including religious practices of Ukrainian immigrants, authors generally tend to overlook Ukrainian Protestants. For instance, a book of articles presented at a major conference on religious practices of Ukrainian Canadians, did not contain a single piece on Ukrainian Evangelicals or Baptists out of over twenty articles. Moreover, those Ukrainian Protestants who belonged to the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada are neglected even when Ukrainian Protestants are being discussed.

48 The Church in the Valley, Lydia McKinnon, compiler (Winnipeg, 1985).
49 The Church in the Valley, 9.
The main reason is that the Union was not a Ukrainian national organization; although ethic Ukrainians comprised majority of Evangelical Christians in Canada, it united believers of many ethnic backgrounds, and never emphasized any particular ethnic component.

Canadian Ukrainian historiography of the broad subject of the religious history of Ukrainians and Canadian Ukrainians often exhibits certain limitations and biases caused by political reasons. Historically the vast majority of Ukrainian immigrants into Canada came from Western Ukraine, also known as Galicia. That part of the ancient Kievan Rus lost independence in the medieval period, and from that time on developed under Polish, Austro-Hungarian, Romanian, and other foreign powers, being completely torn apart from the rest of Ukraine and Russia in political, cultural, and religious aspects. This produced a sense of isolation, self-centredness, and a tendency among some Galician intelligentsia to perceive Galician identity, history, dialect, religious customs, and so on, as standard for “Ukrainian” in a broad sense. Furthermore, after incorporation of Galicia into the USSR in 1939, limitations of religious freedom, forced collectivization and other abuses of power committed by the Stalinist government, provoked further alienation of Western Ukrainians from what they now regarded as the “Muscovite intrusion” into their affairs and way of life. This tendency became especially strong after WWII with the influx of post-war Western Ukrainian immigrants. O. Gerus and J. Rea say in their Ukrainians in Canada: “The injection of these politicised and educated immigrants into Canada caused acute tensions within the established and overwhelmingly

Canadian-born Ukrainian community… Their nationalist arrogance and elitism and their determination to convert the established organized life to their own political purpose (the liberation of Ukraine) was one source of difficulty.”53 Understanding the degree and character of political engagement on behalf of previous scholarship is an extremely important task for a researcher of Ukrainian and Russian religious history in Canada.

Early Canadian publications on immigration deserve special mention. Particularly valuable for this research proved to be James Woodworth’s work, analysing the specific contribution and comparative merits of each of the immigrant groups in early 20th century Canada, including Galicians (western Ukrainians) and Doukhobors54 from the point of view of a sympathetic, but rigorous Anglo-Canadian. James S. Woodsworth (1972-1942) was a Methodist minister and a Canadian political and social activist, one of the pioneers of the social democratic movement and the first leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Foundation.

It was necessary to position Slavic Evangelical Christians within the Canadian religious landscape. A collection of essays The Canadian Protestant Experience, edited by George Rawlyk has served as a key to a systematic understanding of Canadian Protestantism’s historical trajectory.55 It provided a broad framework in which to discuss the story of the Benito church. Slavic Evangelical Christians were a small part of a larger kaleidoscope of Canadian evangelical Christianity. Of special importance for our analysis of the Slavic Evangelicals within the context of Canadian evangelicalism were recent

studies of Mennonites and evangelicalism, the Bible school movement, Baptist, Lutheran and Pentecostal evangelicalism. The Benito church and the Slavic Evangelical movement in general evolved along the lines common for most other Canadian evangelicals. It was the sudden decline and disappearance of the movement that contrasted sharply with the “normal” course of events exhibited by other evangelical groups in the country. An explanation of this abnormality is one of the goals of this thesis.

The complex relationship of ethnic and the religious aspects has also come to the forefront of the Canadian history and sociology of religion. Recently published collection of articles edited by Paul Bramadat and David Seljak is indicative of the growing scholarly interest and relevance of this new perspective. For the purposes of this study articles by Bruce Guenther on evangelicals and ethnicity, by Royden Loewen on Mennonites, and Miroslaw Tataryn on eastern Christians will be of particular use.

Fundamental works on the Mennonite experience in Canada by Frank Epp and Ted Regehr are of special importance for this work due to the parallels one can draw between Mennonites and Slavic Evangelical Christians as two ethno-religious groups. The classical work on the Doukhobors by Woodcock and Avakumovic, complemented

by the Doukhobor perspective of Koozma Tarasoff⁶¹ and a historical geography study by Carl Tracy on the early Doukhobor settlement in Saskatchewan⁶² have served as a basis for a comparison between Slavic Evangelicals and an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally akin Doukhobors who have been Benito’s Evangelical Christians neighbours for a few generations.

**Oral History and an Outline of Methodology**

In our opinion a researcher of a modern or a relatively recent historical, social or religious phenomenon should always seek personal contact with its participants or observers. As Harriet Nathan put it, “it is remarkable that such a simple event, with one person asking questions and one answering can produce such wide-ranging experiences.”⁶³ Unlike those scholars who are by necessity limited to archival, archaeological or other posthumous data, a researcher of immigrant religion in Western Canada in many cases has a fortunate advantage of an interactive and live contact with the subject of his or her studies. Personal interviews may be supported by such informal evidence as surviving personal correspondence, autobiographies, personal diaries, recordings, songs, tales, anecdotes, and photos.

The role oral and other informal history plays in understanding mass religious immigration into Western Canada is extremely important. In the words of Gerald Friesen,

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“Canada’s history has often been told from the vantage point of those who possess the resources that we recognize as power – wealth, military authority, political influence.”  

This is now changing, and the voices of the powerless are now being heard. Lately this fact has been increasingly recognized and appreciated by scholars. Royden Loewen carefully examined the value of Mennonite personal diaries in his book *From the Inside Out*, while Julie Rak attested to the importance of Doukhobor autobiography as a witness narrative. Koozma Tarasoff relied primarily upon personal interviews while working on his research on Russian immigrant societies in Greater Vancouver area, and John Woodsworth used correspondence as his principal source on reconstructing Doukhobor immigration to Canada. A researcher of the Slavic Evangelical communities in the Prairies is in a particularly advantageous position. Due to the fact that Evangelical Christians are relatively late newcomers, it is still possible to find and establish contact with those who were brought to Canada in their young years by their parents, and with many second generation settlers.

The author of the present thesis was able to conduct field work in Benito, Swan River and adjacent areas of Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 2006-2009. As a result interviews with seven former members of the Benito church, their descendants and other local residents were recorded (comprising about a dozen files with sound recordings). These recordings provide a basis for the history of the Benito congregation. Besides, the field work allowed collecting other relevant items, such as photos, artefacts, sound recordings, etc.

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recordings, and publications or their copies. Last, but not least, field work helped the present author to get a feeling of the place, its landscape, landmarks, environment, and people which, is no less important than any written sources or scholarly books.

Alessandro Portelli’s work and methodology were especially instrumental in dealing with the interviews. Data received as a result of interviews, are always, as noted Alessandro Portelli, “always has an unfinished nature of a work in progress” due to its inherent incompleteness.69 The informants interviewed in the course of this research, represent only a small part of those who could possibly tell their own story of the Benito church. Moreover, the same informants might have told the story differently at a different time or under different circumstances. All interviews, although conducted in three languages, English, Russian, and Ukrainian (or, sometimes, in a mix of these languages), were rendered in English, which in itself is a major distortion of the original. A conscious effort was made to convey the emotional background of interviews and the circumstances of the interviewing process. Trust and confidence is another matter in a relationship between the informant and the interviewers.70 The degree of trust is very difficult to assess objectively for an interviewer who is himself or herself a part of the process. All interviews conducted for this study took place in a comfortable setting, yet the author readily acknowledges the line that naturally existed between his informants and himself due to differences of age, background, occupation, among many others.

The author made an earnest attempt to keep in mind limitations, or, rather, peculiarities, of interviews as a source of information when assessing them. To what extent this attempt was successful, is up to the reader. Yet, in our judgement, for the story

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of the Benito church to be told, human interaction with those who once were part or witnesses of it was necessary. As Portelli pointed out, “no research can be considered complete any longer unless it includes oral sources (where available of course).”71

A collection of interviews and archival documents was published in 2001 by the Euro-Asian Accreditation Association (a Christian educational organization) with the support of the Mennonite Central Committee.72 The materials pertain to the history of the Evangelical movement in the Russian Empire and the USSR, and were used in this thesis as needed. Besides, the present author possesses copies of a number of documents from the AUCECB archives. Most of them belong to the post-war period, particularly 1960s, but some date back to the 1920s, and 1930s when the Union of Evangelical Christians still enjoyed legal existence in the USSR.

The theoretical framework of the research, therefore, strives to continue the relatively recent, but growing trend to take into account religious groups’ own histories as they are narrated and interpreted within the group. Consequently, such sources of these histories as interviews, diaries, correspondence, musical and material culture come to the forefront of research. This tendency has been developed lately by Royden Loewen in his comprehensive study of the Mennonite immigrant experience,73 by Julie Rak in her study

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73 Besides Royden Loewen’s From the Inside Out see the following works by the same author: Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjunction (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), Family, Church and Market: Mennonites Communities in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), and, with Gerald Friesen, Immigrants in Prairie Cities: A Century of Canadian Cultural Diversity (University of Toronto Press, 2009).
of the Canadian Doukhobors, and by Catherine Wanner in her work on Ukrainian (in fact, all late and post-Soviet) Evangelical immigration in the USA.74

There are a few apparent reasons why oral history and accounts of personal experience are of such importance for researchers of immigrant religion in Western Canada. The first and most general of them is, according to Royden Lowen, that an informal personal account “turns the often hidden contours of household and community ‘inside out,’ allowing the student to see a dynamic to which census, newspaper, and parish records can only hint.”75 Informal history allows us to restore “the webs of significance”76 of the generations already gone, and appreciate what ordinary people made out of important historical events and what those events meant to them.

Secondly, such religiously motivated settlers in Western Canada as Anabaptists and Doukhobors in varying degrees tended to create separate or insular communities. Sometimes (Hutterites and Community Doukhobors) communal living and working was the only acceptable modus vivendi for a religious group. In the case of Mennonites, settlers had a history of living in block settlements and had an extensive system of internal order cohesive enough to keep them together. Sometimes, as with Slavic Evangelicals, immigrants used to create communities and live near each other mainly due to the language and cultural barrier, and to strengthen the ties of mutual support and encouragement that helped them to survive under challenging circumstances. Insular communities gave birth to insular self-perception and self-identification that Julie Rak called “diasporic imaginary... a set of tropes [used by immigrant communities to]
construct their own history and their own way of relating knowledge about that
history.77 Naturally, a significant part of the collective story constructed by an insular
community remains outside and beyond formal records, media coverage, or even public
awareness. Direct contact with the living voices of those insular communities, or, at least,
echoes of those voices deposited in the informal history, seems to be the best way to
uncover the “hidden worlds” (as Royden Lowen coined them) of the immigrant
experience in the Canadian West.

The third reason stems from the fact that the immigrant story is usually that of
adjustment, and, hence, certain tension. This tension might have been minimal, as in the
case of Slavic Evangelicals, moderate, as with some Mennonites and Hutterites, or grow
up into an open long-term conflict, as with Doukhobors. Communities in the state of an
ongoing tension or conflict with the mainstream usually have an elaborate alternative
history, often diametrically opposite to the official one, revealing rationale for
disagreement or resistance. Looking at Freedomite (or Sons of Freedom, Rus. svobodniki)
Doukhobors as, perhaps, the most outstanding yet representative example, it is clear that
their self-identity has no common ground whatsoever with the image of “illiterate, barn-
burning, non-English speaking, nude bombers propagated by government commissions
and the Canadian media.”78 What seemed irrational, erratic and bizarre from the
mainstream Canadian point of view, made perfect logical sense when seen “from the
inside out.” However, personal communication, private correspondence, listening to
memories and similar sources must be used to gain access to their alternative story since
Freedomites never had any access to Canadian media or other formal means of

communicating their views to the general public. Besides, they never had anyone from the mainstream to represent them before the larger Canadian society. Thus, oral history methods and other informal means of collecting historical data prove to be the practically the only way to see the Freedomite problem objectively.

Finally, our review of sources will not be complete without saying a few words about visual evidence. During our field trips to Manitoba some informants were willing to share such non-verbal and non-textual items as photographs pertaining to the history of the Benito congregation, and, sometimes, to their personal or family history. Such pieces of visual information may be helpful if used properly. To be able to use photos as a source of information, a researcher should gather as much information as possible regarding each piece of photography. Especially important are the date of the photo, the circumstances under which it was taken, identification of the place and people pictured. When analysed properly, a researcher can learn a lot from a photo. For example, photos of the exterior or the interior of the church building may shed light on such details as the quality of construction and its cost, any traditional or heritage construction patterns, religious influences and patterns that may become apparent based upon the interior or decorations of the church, and so on.

**Chapter Division**

The second chapter of the thesis will deal with the origins, history and character of the Slavic Evangelical movement. A special emphasis will be put upon tracing a historical linkage among Evangelical Christians and earlier instances of religious dissent in Russia, particularly, Spiritual Christians as well as kindred church of Russian Baptists.
Pietists. This chapter will demonstrate that, in spite of a high degree of theological and practical kinship with Russian Baptists, the internal philosophy and self-consciousness of the Evangelical Christians was of a noticeably distinct sort.

The third chapter will overview the history of Slavic Evangelical Christians outside Russia and the USSR, the emergence of the diaspora brotherhood, and its geographical extension. The chapter will particularly regard the movement as a transnational phenomenon. Its branches existed in number of ethnically and culturally diverse countries and developments that took place in one location were felt and affected other branches of the movement thousands of kilometres away.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters will treat the history of the Benito congregation within the broader context of the history of Evangelical Christians in Canada and of Russian and Ukrainian immigration to Canada. The periodization of the Benito community history generally coincides with the timing of the immigrant experience in the Canadian Prairies set forth by Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen in their recent study of urban immigrants. According to Loewen and Friesen, “foreign migration to prairie cities can be pictured in three distinct periods, running from 1900 to 1930s, from 1940 to the 1960s, and from 1970 to the 1990s,” where the second period is overshadowed with the war and its effects, and the third period was inaugurated with the advent of Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s multiculturalism policy. Although Benito was a rural community, this periodization applies to it as well.

The fourth chapter will embrace the history of the congregation from late 1920s till the end of World War II, while the fifth chapter will cover the period from the late 1940s till mid-1960s, and the sixth chapter will be devoted to the last time period in the

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life of the church from the mid-1960s till 1996. The reason of this breaking the history of
the Benito church into three parts is twofold. Firstly, by late 1940s what started as a small
rural congregation grew into a large and strong church capable of carrying out
independent projects such as sponsoring DP’s to come to Canada. Secondly, WWII
marked a shift in church demographics, since the halt of any immigration from the East
put an end to the constant influx of newcomers who joined the church no longer keeping
its demographics positive. Besides, from about that time children of the first settlers
began increasingly to leave the farms of their parents in favour of educational and
professional opportunities offered by urban centers, thus further weakening church
demographics. This history will be placed within the geographical, chronological,
cultural and religious context. The history of the community may be divided into three
stages for the purposes of clearer treatment.

The initial stage started when scattered small groups and individuals in the area
officially agreed to form a congregation, erected a church building and acquired a sense
of community and belonging (late 1920s – early 1930s). The Benito congregation that
was officially established around 1930 at first met in private homes of its members or in
Doukhobor prayer homes, with the permission of the Doukhobor community. It was
necessary to use a larger and more specialized space than a private home could offer in
case of church conferences with a large number of guests and in case of evangelistic
meetings aimed at the general public outside of the congregation. However, by 1941 the
Benito church constructed its own church building.

The peak stage, analysed in Chapter V includes late 1940s to early 1960s when
the membership reached its peak, in part due to the influx of post-war immigrants from

80 The Church in the Valley, 15.
Eastern Europe, according to compilation of the Benito Church history written by Linda McKinnon.\textsuperscript{81} This stage was characterized by persistent evangelization efforts, radio broadcasting, activities of the Bible school, church conferences and similar activities.

The third stage, discussed in Chapter VI, may be called the period of decline. The decline started in the late 1960s and lasted until the church was officially disbanded in 1996, although there are still former members living in the area. This period is characterized by membership loss, aging of the membership and a virtual halt of most church activities except worship meetings. The prayer home, initially a fairly small building, was re-built and expanded in the 1960s. However, church membership had been declining since the late fifties due to assimilation and moving out of younger people who took up city jobs in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, and elsewhere instead of traditional farming.

In 1996 the congregation declared itself officially dissolved. The church building, which was not used any longer, started deteriorating structurally. Former members of the congregation attempted to offer the building free of charge to various religious groups in the area. However, these other communities, that faced a similar problem of shrinking and aging membership, declined the offer. The Benito church building was finally demolished in 2003. Its former spot remains empty until now. The former members of the congregation and other lifelong residents of Benito whom the author interviewed preserved fond memories of the Benito church. According to them, the church in its better years was one of the finest and most beautiful and well-kept buildings in town. They expressed deep regret over the need to demolish the church, but regarded it as a

\textsuperscript{81} The Church in the Valley, 45.
lesser evil compared to the state of abandonment and deterioration the building suffered prior to its demolition.

Each of the chapters on the Benito church will deal with internal processes within the church at different stages in terms of both demographics (aging, educational level, occupations, command of English/native languages) and religious practices (appropriating North American Protestant worship practices, church discipline, theology, liturgical use of English). Special attention will be devoted to important markers of the demographic decline (such as steady aging of the membership, rising intermarriage rates, improving educational level, and shrinking use of the native tongue). These developments will be contrasted, where applicable, with parallel developments among comparable groups of religious settlers, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors. They were not the root of the problem per se. Rather, they were an outcome of the internal processes of disintegration that were at work within the broader Slavic Evangelical movement abroad. By contrast, other comparable groups of religious settlers in the Canadian Prairies, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors often exhibited quite different patterns of behaviour under similar circumstances.

The seventh chapter places the Benito church and the movement of the Slavic Evangelical Christians within the context of the Canadian Protestantism, particularly evangelicalism. It also provides a comparative analysis of the responses of other immigrant ethno-religious groups, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors, to the challenges Slavic Evangelicals faced. These challenges included discrimination and prejudice of the wider society and pressure from the government, internal fragmentation, the question of allegiance to a foreign country, among others. Although Slavic Evangelicals experienced
less pressure than these other groups, they proved to be less resilient and ultimately unable to sustain their cohesion as a distinct ethno-religious group.

Finally, the eighth chapter will be devoted to the life stories of two early Slavic Evangelical settlers in Canada, Feoktist Dunaenko and Ivan Shakotko. Although not directly related to the community in Benito, this biographical material will enhance the human dimension of the Evangelical resettlement in this country. It is meant to contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the life of early Evangelical immigrants “from inside out” in order to reveal “hidden worlds” of immigrant religion in the Prairies not accessible otherwise.

The Conclusion will answer a few conceptual questions set forth in this research. Namely, it will be devoted to the analysis of the factors contributing to the stability and cohesion of an ethno-confessional group of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada as well as to obvious and hidden mechanics of its disintegration.
Chapter II. An Historical Outline of the Slavic Evangelical Movement in Russia and the USSR. The Evangelical Vision

This chapter will review the history of the Evangelical Christians and demonstrate their role as an important movement of Russian religious dissent. The chapter begins with an outline of the emergence of Protestantism in modern-day Russia and Ukraine in the latter half of the 19th century, and devotes some space to the Spiritual Christians whose heirs Evangelical Christians became. There were three geographical foci of Protestantism in the Russian Empire, in Ukraine, Caucasus, and Saint Petersburg. The two large Protestant denominations, Baptists and Evangelical Christians, arose out of these isolated foci.

Further, we will indicate our position in regards to the ongoing quest of Russia’s lost Reformation. Evangelical Christians were the most active reformation force, probably the only one capable of starting a nationwide religious reformation movement. The Evangelical Christians, unlike socially and politically more passive Baptists, possessed a vision of a comprehensive reform in Russia, including social, economical, and political aspects. This chapter will describe what the goals and aspirations of the Evangelical community were and how Evangelical Christians understood their own role.

1 Please note that in this thesis the term “Protestant” is used to refer to such religious denominations as the Evangelical Christians, the Baptists, and the Pentecostals. These and similar “sectarian” communities, rather than Lutherans or Calvinists, gained following among the Slavic and non-Slavic population of the Russian Empire and came to represent the Protestant thought and ethos within the Russian and East Slavic context. E.g. Russian Protestants by Steve Durasoff (1969) is devoted almost exclusively to Baptists, Evangelical Christians, and Pentecostals. Recent researchers of the religious dissent in Russia and East Slavic lands, such as Heather Coleman and Catherine Wanner have used the term “Protestantism” in the same sense.

2 Recently the problem has been discussed at length by Sergei Zhuk in his Russia’s Lost Reformation. Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830–1917 (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), and Heather Coleman in Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).

**Russian Religious Dissent before the Advent of Protestantism**

Russia, as it is known, has never had an analogue to the Protestant Reformation of the Western Europe. Although seeds of dissent were ever-present in Russian religiosity, alternatives to the dominant Orthodox church have been always confined to the status of sects. The Reformation of Luther or Calvin did not produce any noticeable immediate effect upon the religion in the country. Russia was too isolated politically, culturally, and mentally from the rest of Europe at that time, and it was not until 18th century that the influence of Protestant forms of theology, worship, and worldview became clearly discernible within Russian sectarianism.³

These proto-Protestant movements that emerged and developed in modern-day Russia and Ukraine are usually referred to as Spiritual Christians (*dukhovnye khristiane*). The two most well known branches of the Spiritual Christians are Molokans and Doukhobors. Both emerged in the 2nd half of the 18th century. Possibly, the general turn towards westernization and the influx of foreigners under by Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725) was a condition that made their emergence possible. Furthermore, the mass religious immigration of European dissidents to Russia provided another impetus for the

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appearance of native religious communities theologically and otherwise fairly similar to European Protestants.  

European Protestantism was only one influence among many in the formative process of the Spiritual Christians. The Protestant influence, even when clearly present, was hardly ever united. Protestant ideas, in a broad sense of the term, came from various directions – Lutheran Pietists, Mennonites, Hutterites, and Quakers. Though western Protestants might have provided certain patterns (such as reliance upon the Bible, egalitarian worship structure, or Christian pacifism), the Spiritual Christians also bore signs of their Orthodox heritage and, possibly, elements of such old traditions of Christian heterodoxy as Gnostics or the Balkan bogumili.

What differentiates Spiritual Christians from most western Protestants is the symbolic interpretation of the Christian sacraments, or rituals, such as baptism and communion. This distinction would later become the main barrier between Molokans and the growing Baptist church in Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere. Some early 20th century “progressive” Molokans in the Caucasus were even referred to as “dry Baptists” (sukhie baptisty), because otherwise those Molokans almost did not differ from the Baptists.

Of course, old sects of Spiritual Christians in Russia were gradually weakened by massive loss of members to expanding Protestant evangelicalism, by emigration from Russia (Doukhobors to Canada in 1898-1899, Molokans to the USA in 1904-1912, New

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Israelites to Uruguay in 1913), and, most gravely, by forced collectivization ordered by Stalin in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Yet, their legacy and the influence on subsequent forms of Russian non-conformist ideology had been noticeable and lasting. In a very substantial way the Spiritual Christians prepared the way for the spread of the Protestant evangelicalism. Without the catalytic role of Spiritual Christians and the support Protestantism enjoyed among their ranks, the success of the latter in Russia might have been far more modest. Thus, the Spiritual Christians contained the necessary ideological ferment that facilitated an easy acceptance of Protestant doctrines and forms of worship, and provided a large social base for the expansion of Protestantism.

Some key features of Spiritual Christians, therefore, are their non-ritualism and their independent character and the lack of identification (in spite of obvious influences) with any foreign denomination or church. Another point of importance for our discussion is their traditionally non-exclusive and tolerant approach to differences in doctrinal details: “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3:6, NIV)

Three Geographical Foci of Russian Protestantism

In the latter half of the 19th century strong mass movements of religious dissent appeared in all probability independently of each other in three geographically distinct parts of the former Russian Empire. One focus, which was located in the present-day Central and Southern Ukraine, is known as the Stundist movement. Stundists emerged

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and grew under the direct influence of the German colonists living in the area. Many of the latter were Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, a revivalist movement within Russian Mennonites that emerged in 1860. Another group of Germans living on numerous colonies that likewise was involved with the birth of the Ukrainian Stundism were Lutheran Pietists and Separatists. Early Ukrainian Stundists either had close associations with the revival-minded Germans through business or neighbourhood, or else were directly employed by them as permanent or temporary workers. The birth of the Ukrainian Stundism can be dated back to 1850s when Fedor Onishchenko, a peasant from the village of Osnova located near the Pietist colony of Rohrbach (nowadays the Odessa region in Ukraine), converted to the Pietist-styled version of Christianity. The first public baptism of Ukrainian adherents of the same type of religion took place in 1869 near the Mennonite colony of Alt Danzig (now the Kherson region of Ukraine). Personal conversion to Christ followed by the water baptism ritual was an essential tenet of the Stundist movement from the very beginning. The Stundists followed a fairly structured organizational pattern in their communities modeled after the Germans. Able leaders appeared in local congregations who led missionary work, and meetings for worship, and administered baptism. Stundists were subject to harsh governmental repression as a

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“harmful sect” and suffered from sporadic outbursts of violence from their Orthodox neighbours, often instigated by the clergy.10

In an early archival document written by the Stundists their organization is referred to as “the baptized Russian brotherhood” (kreshchenoe russkoe bratstvo)11 where “Russian” is, of course, an indication of the non-German ethnic composition of the community. The importance attributed by the Stundists to the ritual of baptism is clear from the following description of it, written by an outsider: “It was performed obligatorily in a river, even in the winter time. In the latter case they made a long ice hole from the river bank up to the spot where the water would reach up to the chest.”12

Baptism among Stundists often had a public character, being a solemn occasion to declare the faith of a supplicant, re-affirm the commitment of the present church members, and to preach to spectators who were at times quite numerous.13

Baptists were a recognized confession in Russia from 1879, although this legal recognition covered only non-Orthodox population of the Russian Empire, such as Germans and Latvians. Nevertheless, Stundists from early on preferred to identify with the Baptists in the hope of gaining legal status and recognition of the authorities. In 1872 Ivan Riaboshapka, one of the first Stundist leaders, petitioned (to no avail) Mikhail Loris-

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10 Testimonies of violence against sectarians are numerous. See, for instance “The Case of Beating of Stundists by Peasants” as of 1878 in F. 442 Op.282 D.16 TsGIAUK Kiev (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, Kiev).
13 N 2252, D., 1887 N 53, TsGARK (Central State Archive of the Republic of Crimea).
Melikov, the Minister of the Interior, on behalf of many co-religionists, whose notarized signatures he collected, to recognize their movement as Baptist, and not Stundist.14

Early Stundists used for some time the Lutheran book of common prayers published in the Russian translation in 1872. After 1880 Ukrainian Baptists “turn to German Baptist presbyters with their religious needs. They translate into Russian for their own use German Baptist hymnals and sermons.”15 After about 10 years from their emergence most Ukrainian Stundists became Baptists in every sense of the word. Not all Stundists turned Baptists, though. Some, “who did not accept the Baptist articles of faith became known under the name of ‘Spiritual Stundists,’ ‘New Stundists,’ ‘Stundo-Pashkovites,’ ‘Non-Anabaptists (ne perekreshchentsy), or ‘Evangelical Christians.’ Those groups were close in their doctrine and practice to Spiritual Christians. They sought support of the Pashkovites (the third focus of the Russian Protestantism we will discuss below), while some of them shared views of the Doukhobors and Leo Tolstoy.16

The second geographical and cultural milieu where a similar movement emerged was the Caucasus (the Northern Caucasus, present-day Russian Federation, and the Transcaucasian region, that is, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). Most members of the Baptist communities in that region initially were former Molokans, disillusioned by the traditionalist faith of Molokanism, and longing for a more personal, modern, and dynamic kind of religion. The first person in the Russian Empire (in Tiflis, now Tbilisi, Georgia) to be become a Baptist was former Molokan minister Nikita Isaevich Voronin

14 Protopriest K. Minin, Missioneerke svedeniia o raskole (Missionary Information on the Schism) (Istina: 1880).
15 Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, Obzor russkih sekt i ikh tolkov (The Review of Russian Sects and Their Branches) (Kharkov: Tipografiia gubernskago pravleniia, 1910), 474.
16 Butkevich, Obzor, 475-476.
on August 20, 1867. Voronin independently came to the conclusion of the necessity of
the water baptism, and local Baptists provided him with a theoretical and practical
framework which fit his aspirations. At first Voronin joined the small German Baptist
curch already existing in Tiflis, but a few years later former Molokans converted to the
Baptist faith outnumbered Germans. Soon groups of Baptists existed in all cities, towns,
and villages where there were Molokan communities.

The group in the Caucasus at once accepted the name of Baptists. This was due to
a few factors. Firstly, the theological framework and the initial church home for the first
converts was provided by the established, albeit small, Baptist community. Secondly,
virtually all first converts (and most converts for decades thereafter) were defectors from
the Molokan church, an established denomination with well-defined internal structure
and a strong identity. Therefore, those who left the old church sought a comparable
confessional structure that could provide the convert with the same sense of identity he or
she enjoyed in the former church. Thirdly, the ritual of water baptism was the main
feature that sharply separated Baptists from Molokans, for otherwise both denominations
stressed the Bible as the word of God, congregational democratic structure, simple
worship with preaching, prayer, and singing, and adherence to high moral standards.
Thus, converts from Molokanism naturally wanted to emphasize their belief in baptism as
a part of Christian practice overlooked in Molokanism. Therefore, a conscious and
deliberate association with the denomination that held baptism as one of the cornerstones
of its doctrine was a logical step.

Orthodox priest Aleksandr Iunitskii in his review of religious dissent in the
Caucasus, brought up substantial evidence of active contacts between former Molokans,

17 Durasoff, Russian Protestants, 37.
new members of Baptist communities, and British and German Baptists. He mentioned visits of British and German Baptist missionaries to the Caucasus and numerous book and brochure titles brought from abroad. Vasilii Pavlov, a young man who was employed by Nikita Voronin as a business manager, was sent by the Baptist community to Hamburg to study in a Baptist theological seminary following his conversion and baptism (1871). 18

We should take into account that Baptists in the Caucasus were on the average wealthier than their Ukrainian counterparts. Many Molokans in the Caucasus, especially urban dwellers, were business owners. The tendency was that the wealthier of Molokans were rather likely to embrace Baptism. 19 Beside their solid financial situation, Baptists in the Caucasus were used to a high degree of religious freedom. They were pretty much left alone in this respect by the government and the Orthodox church, since they lived in a far-away place where the percentage of Russian Orthodox inhabitants they could possibly influence was small. 20 It is, therefore, not surprising that Caucasian Baptists assumed many positions of importance in the emerging Russian Baptist Union.

Many Stundists from the Ukraine were routinely exiled to the Caucasus prior to the Manifesto of Religious Tolerance of 1905, and came in contact with local Baptists. In spite of difficult conditions of exile, Ukrainian Stundists often found it a better option to

18 Iunitskii, 157-159; S. Margaritov, Istoriia russkikh misticheskikh i ratsionalisticheskikh sekt (The History of Russian Mystical and Rationalist Sects) (Simferopol’, 1910), 158.
live peacefully in exile than to endure discrimination, police oppression, and limitations of religious freedom at home.\textsuperscript{21}

The third focus of religious dissent that would later evolve into the movement of Evangelical Christians appeared in the capital, the city of Saint-Petersburg in the 1870s. Gradually, as a result of a conscious effort and mass enthusiasm, it spread from there throughout the country. It had a few noticeable differences from the first two. Remarkably, the St. Petersburg focus had no direct Baptist connections whatsoever until all three foci of Protestantism “discovered” each other some time in the 1880s.

The catalyst of the Evangelical movement in the capital was the British aristocrat, religious activist and preacher Granville Augustus William Waldegrave, 3rd Baron Radstock (1833-1913).\textsuperscript{22} Lord Radstock was among the ranks of the British military during the Crimean War (1853) of Britain and France against Russia, got wounded in a battle, and converted to deep personal faith in Christ under the impact of the horrors of war. Soon thereafter he devoted himself to preaching, charity work among the poor, especially in the London East End, and missionary efforts outside Britain.

In the literature there is a certain degree of confusion regarding Lord Radstock’s denominational connection. Edmund Heier asserted Radstock belonged to “Low Church” Anglicanism or Methodism. Heier supposed that “[Radstock’s activity’s] starting point may be linked with Wesley and his successors in early Methodism."\textsuperscript{23} Heier was silent on the possible connection of Lord Radstock with the church of Plymouth Brethren. Many

\textsuperscript{23} Heier, \textit{Religious Schism}, 32.
other authors mention that Radstock was either a member of the “Open” Plymouth
Brethren, or, at least, was close to them. Radstock’s preaching in Russia suggests that the
Brethren doctrine was very likely part of his worldview. As it is known, Plymouth
Brethren is a restorationist movement. They generally avoid anything that can be
interpreted as a sign of denominationalism, and see no difficulty (especially Open
Brethren) in joint preaching and charity activities with any other Christians that teach
salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism, according to Brethren, has nothing to
do with salvation, and is merely is an outward symbol. Not surprisingly, Radstock did not
baptize anyone on his missionary trips to Russia. Nor did he preach baptism or any other
rituals. He also promoted a decidedly non-denominational stance. According to Heier,
“when asked what religion he [i.e. Radstock] professed he would state the Christian, and
to what church specifically, he replied the Church of Christ.”

The preaching of Radstock was directed by necessity to the Russian aristocracy
and to the educated classes since he preached in French, then widely spoken by the
Russian elite, or in English, and rarely were his speeches translated into the local
language. Radstock visited Russia three times, in 1874, 1875, and 1876. As a result, a
circle of believers was formed in the capital, which consisted mostly of influential and
rich members of aristocracy, such as Colonel Vasilii Aleksandrovich Pashkov, the aide-
de-camp to the emperor, Count Bobrinskii, then Minister of Transport, Princess Lieven,
Modest Modestovich Korf, Countess Gagarina, and others. Colonel Pashkov soon

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became the leader of the group, and, making use of his own substantial wealth, launched a preaching campaign among factory workers and lower strata of society in Saint-Petersburg, workers on his own estates throughout Russia, and elsewhere. Followers and sympathizers of this movement became known as pashkovtsy (the Pashkovites), although they called themselves simply Christians, or Gospel Christians (evangel’skie khristiane).

As we can see, chronologically this third focus of Protestantism appeared somewhat later than the first two. However, it was by the initiative of Pashkov and thanks to the non-denominational approach of his group that the first joint conference of all Evangelically-minded believers in Russia was called for in the city of Saint Petersburg in 1884.27 The conference of 1884, which highlighted differences among dissenting groups, marked an important benchmark in the early history of Protestantism in Russia. It showed the independent character of the Pashkovites as a non-conformist group in its own right, and made obvious the leading and, indeed, visionary role of the emerging Evangelical Christian movement in the process of the attempted Reformation in Russia.

Characteristically, among the delegates of the conference were Stundists and Baptists along with Spiritual Christians, Molokans and Doukhobors.28 Apparently, the Pashkovite non-denominational approach regarded them all as the seed of that planned great revival.

Summarizing our discussion of the three foci of the evangelical dissent in the Russian Empire, it is worthwhile to emphasize once again a non-denominational character of the Pashkovites and their non-alignment with any particular Western religious group, their broad vision of a large-scale religious and social reform for the

27 Durasoff, Russian Protestants, 44-46.
whole Russia of which they sought to become an integral part, and their stress upon non-
ritualism and disregard of external forms of worship which linked them to the
autochthonous Spiritual Christians. Pashkov’s goal was not to baptize Molokans, but,
rather, to provide them with a renewed basis of faith common for all likeminded believers,
while minor disagreements did not worry him. Pashkov and Saint-Petersburg believers
invited Molokans, Doukhobors, Baptists, and Stundists to Saint Petersburg to discuss
what they had in common and how they could work together.

**The Emergence of the Evangelical Christians. Baptists and Evangelical Christians**

The “Radstockist,” or “Pashkovite” movement that emerged among the upper
strata of Russian society very soon overcame its social limitation and began to spread
throughout the Empire. Of course, Pashkov, Korf and other wealthy aristocrats gave an
impulse to the missionary work, contributing large amounts of money to charity, printing
popular brochures (through The Society for Encouragement of Spiritual and Ethical
Reading, which legally existed in Russia till 1884), and holding mass gospel meetings in
their spacious Saint-Petersburg palaces. Yet, as the movement gained momentum, recent
converts, often peasants or factory workers, joined the work of disseminating the non-
denominational, Bible-based non-ritualistic Christianity. Religious sectarians that resided
throughout the country, particularly, in Southern Russia and the Ukraine, were a special
goal of these unification efforts. The diverse social and geographical base of the
Pashkovite movement is quite distinct from the more homogenous membership of
Caucasian Baptists and Ukrainian Stundists. The social make-up of the Ukrainian
Stundists included mostly impoverished landless peasants,\textsuperscript{29} and that of Caucasian Baptists was characterised by the prominence of middle to upper middle class bourgeoisie. In the case of the Evangelical Christians-Pashkovites it would be difficult, probably impossible, to define a specific strata of the society where the movement was especially strong. Klibanov admitted that Pashkovism “crossed the thresholds of high-society houses and penetrated into the milieu of artisans, meshchane (townspeople), workers, the lumpen proletariat and also the peasant population.”\textsuperscript{30} This is in agreement with the observation made by Timofei Butkevich, that Pashkovites proselytized more consistently among all classes of the Russian population and used more sophisticated methods than any other sectarians.\textsuperscript{31} So, the social composition of Evangelical Christians contrasted with two other Protestant branches in Russia in that it had more even representation of different classes and ranks of society among their ranks.

The Conference of 1884 was aborted by the police in the middle of its proceedings, and the delegates from the interior were forcibly sent home. The wave of reaction that followed led to eventual banishment of Vasilii Pashkov and Modest Korf from Russia, forced dissolution of the Society for Spiritual and Ethical Reading, and a prohibition of public gospel meetings. Many of the titles that had been previously published by the Society were confiscated and destroyed. Russian nobility that were members or sympathizers of the Pashkovites, were still able to conduct gospel meetings in the privacy of their homes, but all public preaching was now illegal. Moreover, the governmental reaction and the risk of falling into disfavour with the court turned many of

\textsuperscript{29} Klibanov, \textit{History of Religious Sectarianism}, 242.
\textsuperscript{30} Klibanov, \textit{History of Religious Sectarianism}, 245.
\textsuperscript{31} Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, \textit{Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov} (\textit{A Review of Russian Sects and Their Branches}) (Kharkov: Tipografiia gubernskago pravleniia, 1910), 503-4.
the nobility away from the Evangelical cause. Pashkov and Korf did what they could to provide leadership and guidance from a distance, but they obviously could not manage it in an adequate manner. Of all the places of worship in the capital only three persisted after the banishment of the leaders: the homes of Mme. Chertkova, Prinecess Gagarina, and Princess Lieven.32 With few male activists capable of preaching and conducting prayer meetings, the Saint-Petersburg Pashkovites started to invite Baptist and Stundist preachers. According to Heier, this created “a development which deviated even farther from the ecumenical venture which sought at the beginning to do away with denominational differences. With the arrival of such preachers and especially I.S. Prokhanov in the 1890’s in St. Petersburg, a Baptist of Molokan origin from the Caucasus, the Pashkovites like all other Evangelicals evolved into just another sect with a distinct congregational theology and structure.”33 Edmund Heier finished his study of the Pashkovite movement with its persecution and touched briefly the arrival of Prokhanov who was finally able to provide energetic and efficient leadership for the scattered groups of the Pashkovites. For Heier, Prokhanov’s leadership was a sign that the movement was becoming yet another “sect,” thus deviating from its original purpose. Any mass movement, albeit spontaneous and informal at the beginning, has to face sooner or later the inevitable question of formalizing its status. Weber wrote, “Indeed, in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both.”34 The Pashkovite movement could not be an exception even if Pashkov and Korf

32 Heier, Religious Schism, 147.
33 Heier, Religious Schism, 147.
would have remained in Russia. However, it is reasonable to believe that the direction the movement took under the leadership of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov, was not a deviation, but rather, a logical development of what it was originally meant to be. Prokhanov created a centralized organization instead of a large number of loose groups. Evangelical Christians summarized their beliefs in a written creed (which was a pre-requisite of their legal registration). But otherwise the Union of Evangelical Christians created by Ivan Prokhanov preserved such basic and distinct tenets of Pashkovism as ecumenism and openness towards all like-minded believers; pursuit of unity or active co-operation with all Christians based upon shared goals despite theological disagreements; social concern and advocacy of a large-scale social and spiritual reform; explicit non-ritualism and simple and democratic structure.

**Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov**

Ivan Prokhanov was born in 1869 in Vladikavkaz, North Caucasus into a Molokan family. Throughout his lifetime Prokhanov retained the fondness, respect and intimate love towards his Molokan family, the Molokan way of life in general, and the hard path of suffering, obedience, and faithfulness the Molokans took. His father became a Baptist, and Ivan himself was baptized at the age of 17 in his native town. In 1888 he departed for Saint Petersburg to become a student at the Technological Institute. Simultaneously he joined the circle of Pashkovites in the capital, and became one of the active members and preachers. In 1893 Prokhanov graduated from the Institute with an engineering diploma. Even before his conversion, Prokhanov displayed great interest in

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philosophy and intellectual attempts to find answers to the meaning of life. He read works popular at that time by Arthur Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann. He was also fascinated by the personality and work of Leo Tolstoy, whom Prokhanov visited in person on his way home following the graduation.\footnote{Prokhanoff, \textit{In the Cauldron of Russia}, 76-81.}

After his graduation young Ivan Prokhanov worked for some time as an engineer. In 1893 Prokhanov and a few of his friends made a short-lived attempt to found an intentional Christian agricultural community in the Crimea. Soon Prokhanov got the news about his father being exiled to Transcaucasia for his religious activism. He had to abandon the colony, and returned to Vladikavkaz. It turned out that he risked being arrested and exiled himself, so Prokhanov decided to leave Russia in 1895. He went to England through Sweden and France (where his brother Aleksandr was studying medicine). In England he received some theological training at the Baptist Theological College in Bristol for a year, and then at a College of the Congregational church in London. Prokhanov explained in his Autobiography that his rationale for changing schools was to get to know different denominations. He wrote: “I desired to gain as comprehensive a view of all the Protestant Christian denominations of Western Europe as might be possible.”\footnote{Prokhanoff, \textit{In the Cauldron of Russia}, 97.} Ivan was deeply impressed by the religious freedom reigning in Great Britain. He was particularly impressed with the street meetings organized by the Salvation Army. His own milieu during his sojourn in that country was rather multi-denominational. His tuition at the Baptist College was paid by the Quakers. The Quakers also provide him with the lodging. After Britain Ivan Prokhanov proceeded to Berlin and then Paris, where he was attending lectures at the Faculty of Theology at the Berlin
University and the Faculty of the Protestant Theology at Sorbonne in 1896-97. Prokhanov regarded his stay in Europe as a temporary one, waiting for an opportunity to return to Russia. Finally, in 1898 Prokhanov was asked to help the members of the Russian pacifist sect of the Doukhobors stranded on the island of Cyprus on their way to Canada, and, after that, in the same year, returned to Russia. Upon his return, Prokhanov taught at the Polytechnical Institute in Riga and worked for the Russian branch of the US-owned Westinghouse Company that was developing a light rail system in the capital.  

Although Prokhanov had become a recognized leader of Evangelical Christians earlier, it was not until 1908 that the communities of Evangelical Christians formed a union. In 1905, following the publication of the Imperial October Manifesto, proclaiming religious toleration, formerly illegal or semi-legal “sectarian” communities received the right to be registered as juridical persons, and, therefore, freely gather for worship, own property, publish books and periodicals, perform recognized marriages etc. According to the new rules, legal registration was necessary to conduct all sorts of missionary endeavours that Prokhanov and his friends were contemplating. The codified articles of faith that were adopted in 1910 were also a legal requirement of the authorities. So, speaking of a growing “denominationalism” of the Evangelical Christians, we should consider that a certain restructuring was a response to the changing legal requirements of

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38 Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 107-114.
39 The Manifesto contained the following provision: “We require the government dutifully to execute our unshakeable will: to grant to the population the essential foundations of civil freedom, based on the principles of genuine inviolability of the person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.” Tr. by Daniel Field.
the state. A non-denominational brotherhood of churches with no written creed would have never been registered under the law existing in Russia at that time.\footnote{The right to gather for worship legally even after the Manifesto of 1905 was granted on a case by case basis to specific religious denominations. Baptists and Stundists were recognized legally as of April 17th, 1906. For instance, local police department of Kovel’ in Volhynia specifically referred to that legal act when asked for a clarification on legality of an Evangelical community in Kovel’. (F. 1598 Op.1 D.194 TsGIAUK, Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine). Sectarian religious communities applying for registration needed to supply a creed for evaluation. See, for instance, “Ob uchrezhdenii Astrakhanskoi obshchiny Evangel’skikh Kristian” (On Establishment of a Community of Evangelical Christians in Astrakhanka), F 27, op.1, d.11703 TsGARK Central State Archive of the Republic of Crimea.}

In December of 1908, at the 1\textsuperscript{st} All-Russian Conference of the Evangelical Christians in Saint-Petersburg, Prokhanov was elected its chairman.\footnote{Ivan Petrovich Plett, Zarozhdenie Tserkvei EKHB (Emergence of Evangelical-Baptist churches) Available online at \url{http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00324.htm#7}.} At the same time he was the presbyter of one of the Saint-Petersburg local churches. The Union was contemplated as a home for all like-minded Biblical Protestants, not churches, but individuals. “Members of the Union could be all those who sympathize with its goals and tasks and profess key Gospel doctrines. In all other issues of the Christian faith, especially in the sphere of the external expressions of faith and the church organization, the members enjoyed freedom.”\footnote{Istoriia Evangel’skikh kristian-Baptistov v SSSR (The History of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the USSR) (Moscow: VSEKhB, 1989), 148-149.} Prokhanov’s goal was to work towards “thorough renewal of the religious life of the Russian nation, which he called the spiritual reformation. He was deeply convinced that ‘along with an acute necessity of political and economic reforms… a true renewal of Russia is only possible through a spiritual regeneration and improvement of each individual.’ In this issue Prokhanov at once met opposition from the side of the Russian Baptists.”\footnote{Prokhanoff, \textit{In the Cauldron of Russia}, 149-50.} The Baptists believed that the role of a Christian and of a Christian community is limited to preaching the Gospel and saving souls, while all political, economic, social and similar concerns are totally outside their responsibility. The Baptists took the stance of social passivity and non-involvement in the
turbulent times. The Baptist Union did not have any vision for Russia specifically, and did not picture itself as a participant in any social development in the country outside strictly religious activities. At first glance such a position of Russian Baptists may seem difficult to comprehend considering that Baptists in North America and Europe were often part of the establishment, counting numerous politicians and social actors among their ranks.\(^{44}\) There is certainly nothing in the Baptist faith per se that discourages political or social activism. The position of Russian Baptists is not hard to explain considering two factors. One of them is the profound influence of German Mennonites (especially in the Ukraine) and Russian Molokans (in the Caucasus). Both groups were to a great degree alienated from the social and political life in Russia, the former primarily due to their own internal restrictions and isolation, and the latter—mainly because of their status as socially and geographically marginalised sectarians. The other factor is the position, both perceived and objective, of the Russian Baptists as a branch of a foreign religious body. As Sergey Filatov put it in a recent article about Russian Protestantism, “[Baptists, as opposed to Evangelical Christians] are foreign to social and political questions, they think about the heavenly, not the earthly, homeland; co-religionists residing in other lands, are closer to them than compatriots who do not know the true God.”\(^{45}\) The Baptists and the Evangelical Christians had a strikingly different understanding of what their work meant for their country and their people and how that work should be properly carried out. Prokhanov realized that the work of a large-scale Reformation in the country through the non-denominational Evangelical Union would not

\(^{44}\) It will suffice to name such prominent figures as Andrew Johnson and Warren Harding, the 17th and 29th US Presidents (not to mention present-day politicians), Alexander McKenzie, the Canadian Prime minister in 1870s, or Martin Luther King.

be done unless the Reformation became the will of the masses. But it could not become a mass movement unless it addressed the problems, including social, economic, and political, that concerned the people in general, and offered satisfactory solutions to those problems.46

The growth of the Union of Evangelical Christians under the conditions of freedom was truly amazing. The membership rose from 8,472 members in 1914 to 250,000 in 1922.47 The February democratic revolution of 1917 which ended the monarchical rule in Russia, brought about more freedom for non-Orthodox believers, and their legal status became from that time on equal with that of the Orthodox church.

Prokhanov understood that a favourable image with the authorities and a certain political lobby would be instrumental in order to reach his goals. He noted that most political parties in Russia were negative towards the Evangelical movement. The right wing parties supported Orthodoxy, and the left were against religion in general. He said that moderate or centrist parties did help the Evangelical cause. Inspired by the democratic goals of the February revolution proclaimed by the Provisional Government, Prokhanov became interested in politics. He founded a Christian political party Voskresenie (Resurrection), which later took part in the Russian parliamentary (Duma) elections. The party generally shared the political platform of the larger and wide-spread centrist party of Constitutional Democrats (known as kadets), but with an emphasis on spiritual and ethical aspects. Interestingly, some of the party’s goals sounded rather utopian, for

46 See Evangel’skaia vera, 5 (1932) 5-7.
47 Durasoff, The Russian Protestants, 56; Bolshakoff, Russian Nonconformity, 119.
example, a call to unite all countries into a Worldwide Union of States.\textsuperscript{48} The party existed till October of 1917 when the Bolshevik revolution practically put an end to the political pluralism in Russia.\textsuperscript{49} Nevertheless, the Communist authorities were quite tolerant towards religion till the late 1920s. In fact, in the first decade of the Soviet regime sectarian movements even improved their situations compared to the pre-Revolutionary period.\textsuperscript{50} Evangelical Christians, just as other religious bodies, had the right to preach, own property, and publish books and periodicals. Pacifist believers could apply for non-combatant civil service in lieu of military draft, and those who believed in communal living established numerous intentional collective farms. They were frequently supported by the government, because communal ownership and labour resembled the Communist ideal of collective work and sharing. The famous City of Gospel (\textit{Evangel'sk}) project of a large urban Christian communal settlement in southern Siberia championed by Prokhanov, also belongs to that period of relative religious freedom.\textsuperscript{51} According to Nikol’skaia, first communal enterprises of Evangelical Christians emerged as early as 1918, although sectarian collective farms and communes became a part of the Soviet government policies from 1920.\textsuperscript{52}

Prokhanov as well as later generations of Slavic Evangelical Christians emphasized their apolitical stance. In his biography Prokhanov mentioned that he only


\textsuperscript{50} See, for instance, Coleman, \textit{Russian Baptists}, 155-56.

\textsuperscript{51} Prokhanoff, \textit{In the Cauldron of Russia}, 231-232.

\textsuperscript{52} Nikol’skaia, \textit{Russkii protestantizm}, 70.
ran for a parliamentary seat “in the interest of the Evangelical cause.” Nikol’skaia questioned the authenticity of this claim and asserted that Prokhanov in reality went through a passion for politics, and even for Communism, although the latter passion, in her opinion, was hardly sincere. In his Autobiography Prokhanov pointed to the unprecedented freedom former religious dissenters enjoyed during the first years of the Soviet rule. He credited the Bolshevik authorities for “securing religious liberties for the citizens of the Soviet Republics” and “granting real religious freedom.” He remarked that “if Lenin had lived there would not have been such a terrible persecution.” Nikol’skaia somewhat sarcastically wrote about Prokhanov’s “compliments to the Soviet rule” found, as she believed, in his Autobiography. She ironically remarked that “the only thing left for the author [Prokhanov] was to thank the Soviet authorities for his own arrest [in 1923].” In our opinion, irony in this case is not appropriate. Prokhanov wrote his Autobiography outside the USSR, and it was first published in New York in 1933. Surely, under such circumstances nothing could have made him contradict his conscience or his sense of objectivity. Besides, where applicable, he just as well wrote about the “terrible persecution” believers in the USSR had to endure in the 1930s. Apparently, Prokhanov genuinely perceived the 1920s as the time of great hopes and expectations.

Prokhanov remained the honorary chairman of the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians even after he left Russia in 1928. In the same year at the World Baptist Alliance congress in Toronto, Prokhanov was not re-elected as a Vice-president of the WBA. Wilhelm Kahle suggested that it was not a personal attack on Prokhanov

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53 Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 172.
54 Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, 176.
who, after all, had been holding that position since 1911.\textsuperscript{55} Rather, WBA was aware that Prokhanov no longer represented a strong and growing church in Russia. Ivan Prokhanov died in Berlin in 1935.

**Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR after Prokhanov**

In spite of repeated attempts if not to merge, at least to co-ordinate the efforts, the relationship between the Baptists and Evangelical Christians in the USSR in 1920s and 1930s was deteriorating. Even the shared threat of the atheist governmental repression in the 1930s did not cause the two Unions to reconsider their increasing alienation from each other. A letter to all communities of the Evangelical Christians and their missionary workers of 1932 signed by all prominent leaders of the Evangelical Christians, namely Iakov Zhidkov (the future President of the AUCECB!), Aleksei Andreev, Mikhail Orlov, Aleksandr Karev, entirely devoted to the relationship with the Baptists, is more than explicit about it. “We are the guardians who stand on top of the watchtower, and, having noticed a threat, we must send a warning. Our brothers and sisters in different localities have accustomed in the past, due to various talks about unity, to regard Baptists as a kindred and close [movement]. In many aspects of the teaching it is so. But this closeness, given all their errors, is all the more what urges us to warn the Evangelical Christians about their errors.”\textsuperscript{56} A seven-page document goes on pointing to those errors.

Firstly, Baptists are accused of a non-Biblical name, since Baptists, according to the document, was initially a nickname given to a sect by their adversaries. Moreover, the authors asserted that Baptists somehow “mocked” the name of the Evangelical Christians.

\textsuperscript{55} Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion (Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union).* (Oncken Verlag: Wuppertal und Kassel, 1978), 214.

\textsuperscript{56} AUCECB Archives, Folder 1d-1.2.
Secondly, the document declared the Baptist tradition of laying of hands on the newly baptized members an error. Thirdly, the Baptist practice that only ordained ministers may perform rituals such as baptisms or breaking of bread was considered erroneous. Fourthly, the document accused the Baptists of the privileged status that ordained ministers enjoyed among them. Then, Baptists were declared guilty of slander against Ivan Prokhanov personally. Lastly, the letter condemned the modernism of the greater Baptist community, naming specifically the World Baptist Alliance as an organization infected with theological modernism. The document urged the Evangelical Christians to be cautious and aware of the dangers of the Baptists (their negative influence was even compared to that of the Pentecostals). Former Baptists who applied for membership in communities of the Evangelical Christians were to be accepted only after a probation period.  

The situation for members and leadership of both branches of the Russian Protestantism was increasingly difficult in 1932. Mass arrests, imprisonment, or exile of religious activists and rank and file believers were well underway. However, the rivalry and tension between the two branches did not cease. Such a document would be impossible to explain by any external pressures, since both movements were in a very similar situation, and the government at that time had no plans to unite the two movements, but rather, hoped to destroy them altogether.

The Union of Baptists in the USSR ceased to exist as a legal entity in 1935, while the Union of Evangelical Christians existed legally throughout the hard decade of the 1930s. The legally functioning Union of Evangelical Christians became a shared harbour for both Evangelical Christians and Baptists after the Union of Baptists had been

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57 AUCECB Archives, Folder 1d-1.2.
58 Nikol’skaia, Russkii protestantizm, 101-105.
dissolved. Many local Baptist groups and individual Baptist believers joined existing churches of Evangelical Christians. Of course, many Baptist churches still existed illegally or semi-legally throughout the USSR, so the Baptist movement, although deprived of their headquarters, was still part of the religious landscape.\(^{59}\)

Ironically, the unity that seemingly was too hard to achieve via negotiations, was attained in a short time and without hindrance by the order of Joseph Stalin. Iakov Zhidkov, who was so critical of the Baptists in 1932, became the head of the united church of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in 1944.\(^{60}\) The story of the AUCECB is beyond the scope of this research. However, according to some scholars, the differences between the constituent parts of the Union were still felt decades thereafter.\(^{61}\) In the early 1960s, when a major split occurred within the AUCECB over the issue of compliance with the governmental interference with church life, there re-emerged groups of “pure Baptists.” According to Leon McBeth, the 1960s split occurred primarily along the lines of Evangelical Christians versus Baptists, where the former overwhelmingly remained in registered churches, while the latter favoured the separation.\(^{62}\) However, Tatiana Nikol’skaia did not support this view, and explained the split of the 1960s as a grass-roots movement of church activists and members, often of younger generation, against the rigid structure of the church, strengthened government control, and violation of basic

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\(^{60}\) Durasoff, *Russian Protestants*, 104-107.


\(^{62}\) Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (B & H Publishing Group, 1987), 817. See also a historical overview at the website of the Odessa Evangelical Baptist church at [www.400.baptist.od.ua](http://www.400.baptist.od.ua) (URL accessed on 20 August, 2010).
principles of Evangelical Christians and Baptists by both the AUCECB and the Soviet authorities.\textsuperscript{63}

Core Topics of the Evangelical Christian Vision

There are some core topics of the Slavic Evangelical discourse clearly discernible in the periodicals published by Evangelical Christians at different times, both before and after Prokhanov’s death, such as \textit{Khristianin} (until 1928, Saint Petersburg/Leningrad), \textit{Evangel’skaia vera} (1931-1940, New York, Berlin, and Tallinn), and \textit{Evangel’skoe slovo} (1962-1977, Chicago). They are reformation, a special vision for the Slavic peoples, spiritual continuity of the Evangelical Christianity, strict non-denominationalism with a closely related emphasis on spiritual and administrative independence, and social utopia.

As the movement of Evangelical Christians crystallized as a distinct branch of Protestantism in the early 1900’s, it needed to place itself within the ranks of historical Protestant Christianity. The closeness between Evangelical Christians and other Protestant movements was obvious. At the same time, from the point of view of Evangelical Christians, historical Protestant Reformation failed to achieve its goals. The 1932 prayer week called Evangelical Christians to pray for “so called Protestant Christian churches,” which emerged through the reformation during the time of Hus, Luther, and Zwingli, but “are now in a great decline.” The decline is attributed to the “spirit of rationalism and politics,” and resulted in a virtual stop of mission.\textsuperscript{64} Thus, the historical Reformation in Europe was insufficient: “Successors of the reformers must have gone

\textsuperscript{63} Nikol’skaia, \textit{Russkii protestantizm}, 201-215.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 12 (1932): 5.
further… Consequently, traditions, formalism, hierarchism, ignoring of the social side of the life crawled into the Reformation churches.\textsuperscript{65}

The parallels Evangelical Christians saw between themselves and historical reformers prompted them to work towards, or, at least, dream about, a reformation of the Orthodox church, just as historical reformers strove to reform the Roman Catholic church. The success of Evangelical Christians during the period of the relative religious freedom in the 1920s was described in terms of conversion of Orthodox priesthood and hierarchs to the Evangelical faith. “The power of Gospel was such, that priests of the Orthodox church began to turn to Christ, others started to give away their churches to the meetings of Evangelical Christians, and ask our preachers to preach in their temples.”\textsuperscript{66}

Characteristically, a report on a missionary trip of an Evangelical Christian leader to western Canada in the mid 1930s, bore a name “Even an Orthodox Priest Greeted [the Preacher].” The report informed that a local Orthodox priest in a locality of Viceroy in Saskatchewan attended a meeting of Evangelical Christians, and greeted the preacher.\textsuperscript{67}

The complete reformation, thus, was beginning in the Slavic lands, and, being an independent of foreign churches movement, bore distinct Slavic elements. Time and again periodicals of Evangelical Christians reiterated the idea that their mission was directed in the first place towards the Slavic peoples. While the first article of the first issue of \textit{Evangel’skaia vera} had the title “Christ and the Humankind,” the following article was called “Christ and the Russian People.”\textsuperscript{68} The Evangelical Christian

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 4 (1933): 11.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 1 (1931): 20. Same motive are apparent in Prokhanov’s Autobiography, see \textit{In the Cauldron of Russia}, 210-16.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 10-11 (1932): 14.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 1 (1931): 2.
movement was depicted as a Good Samaritan, sent by God to give Russia spiritual healing and material prosperity. “The Gospel Call,” signed by Ivan Prokhanov and the USA Slavic Evangelical leader I.F. Shevchuk, urged fellow believers: “Almost wherever you live there are Russian or other Slavic souls. You must know how to approach them to proclaim Gospel to them.” At the same time the New York community called to Christ “the entire Slavic nation.” Some thirty years later a report from the Buenos Aires, Argentina sent to *Evangel’skoe slovo* by Roman Khil’chuk read: “By Lord’s grace, for twenty-five years the Buenos Aires church has been bringing the Gospel message to the Slavic people.” Argentina was a predominantly Roman Catholic country, and, therefore, there were many people in the need of conversion. All or most members of the church had been living in Argentina for a long time or had been born there and, thus, were fluent in Spanish. Yet, the Buenos Aires church still saw its primary goal in preaching to the Slavic population, not unlike many conservative Canadian Mennonites, who limited their mission outreach to scattered people of Mennonite descent or speakers of German.

The very fact that Evangelical Christians saw themselves as having if not material, then spiritual link to the historical Reformation in Europe, suggested the great role spiritual continuity played for them. In accordance to their vision of the Slavic reformation, the image of Jan Hus, the Czech reformer of the 15th century and the predecessor of the Moravian Church was of a special significance. An article on a visit to a Moravian Brethren community near Magdeburg in Germany by Prokhanov was published in *Evangel’skaia ver", where the Moravian church was praised as “the blessed

69 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 5.
fruit of the reform activity of Jan Hus.” Elsewhere in the magazine Hus was called “the first evangelical reformer and martyr in Europe.” Apparently, Slavic Evangelicals liked to regard themselves as heirs of the brave Slavic hero of faith.

Evangelical Christians emphasized their Pashkovite roots. If Vasilii Pashkov died in 1902, another early Pashkovite leader, Modest Korf, settled in Switzerland following his banishment from Russia in 1884. Evangelical Christians in the USSR regained contact with him only in 1927. The April 1927 issue of Khristianin published letters to Prokhanov and to the Evangelical Christians sent by Modest Korf, a veteran of the Evangelical revival in St. Petersburg banished from Russia together with Vasilii Pashkov. Korf was called “a prominent [evangelical] activists of the time” and “a veteran fighter for the freedom of consciousness in Russia.” Korf, in his turn, asserted that he was “separated from you [Evangelical Christians in the USSR] only by an earthly distance.” Korf, according to him, continued preaching among “compatriots”, apparently Russian-speaking immigrants, in Switzerland. Contacts with Korf continued until his death in 1933, and Korf’s letters to Evangelical Christians were regularly published. Nearly 90 years old at that time Korf came to be an icon of the movement, symbolizing a life entirely devoted to Christ and a testimony to the link between the St. Petersburg revival of the 1870s and contemporary Evangelical Christians. In July, 1933 the magazine published a note “The Remarkable 90 Year Anniversary” devoted to Korf’s birthday and a short edifying story by Korf. The death of Modest Korf that occurred in November,

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1933 was marked by a lengthy and eulogistic obituary. In 1939 the magazine published a memoir about Modest Korf by a reader from Finland. On the other hand, drawing on the authority of such well known and respected Christian evangelical activists as Wesley, Boots, Finney, Moody, and Spurgeon constituted a claim of the Evangelical Christians for a spiritual continuity of the world evangelicalism of which they were an inalienable part.

Non-denominationalism, that is, a non-alignment with any of the existing denominations of historical Christianity, was a matter of principle for Slavic Evangelicals. According to “The Brotherly Word,” collectively signed by all Evangelical leaders, “the free evangelical church in Russia is not a sect… Treasuring its achievements in the spiritual life, it nevertheless admits that… the universal Triumphant Church will consist of the pious ones from all nations, tribes, and all religious organizations.” Periodicals of Evangelical Christians of all periods had a marked tendency to avoid, unless absolutely necessary, references to the names of Protestant denominations. Prokhanov’s strange reluctance to even mention Baptists in his Autobiography was pointed out earlier. However, this tendency was not limited to Prokhanov alone or to the period when Prokhanov was the leader. Materials published in Khristianin of the 1920s practically never contained any references to any Christian denominations other than Evangelical Christians even when such a reference would have been relevant. For instance, well-known Christian preachers or activists, such as William Booth (the founder of the Salvation Army), or famous Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, whose sermons Khristianin regularly published, were called simply Christians with no reference to their denominations.

77 Evangel’skaiia vera, 1 (1934): 2.
78 Evangel’skaiia vera, 10-12 (1939): 4.
denominational affiliation. Interestingly, materials published by *Evangel’skoe slovo* in the 1960s much in the same manner carefully avoided references to specific denominations. While the movement participated in many joint initiatives with evangelicals of many types, the magazine contained almost no reference to any denomination whatsoever. For example, a report on the “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” of Evangelical Christians that took place in May, 1962 in Vancouver, Canada, mentioned greetings received “from brothers and sisters in Russia.” Those by necessity must have been members of the joint church of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, the fact omitted in the report. English-speaking guests at Slavic Evangelical events of the period were never referred to by the name of their denomination in the magazine. Closely related to non-denominationalism is the emphasized independence of Evangelical Christians from other church structures. Overall, Evangelical Christians regarded themselves as more consistent reformers than most Western Christians. “The independent character of the Evangelical movement explains the fact that it has gone much further than western reformations [sic!]. The Russian Free Evangelical church at this point is not identical with any other group on earth, although akin to many of them.”

Finally, the Slavic Evangelical movement contained an element of social and religious utopia. This fact was noted by Tat’iana Nikol’skaia in her discussion of Prokhanov’s social ideal and flirting with the idea of Christian communism during the early 1920s. Later, in the diaspora, the utopian component persisted. At least twice over the course of a few years *Evangel’skaia vera* published Prokhanov’s article on the creation of a new, Evangelical culture. Some of its precepts vividly remind of

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82 Nikol’skaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 70.
Campanella’s *City of Sun* or Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. For instance, Evangelical Christians were supposed to marry early, their clothes needed to be of light colours, their houses were to have houses for birds and flowers in windows, etc.\textsuperscript{83} At least some Evangelical Christians in the diaspora heeded these recommendations. Brother Mazurin from Canada wrote in his letter to the editor regarding the Evangelical culture: “I find it necessary that all Evangelical churches apply these rules. Through the Evangelical culture we will attain the Gospel life, intelligent, pure, and joyful.”\textsuperscript{84}

**Conclusion**

The distinction between the Slavic Baptists and Evangelical Christians lay not only in subtle theological disagreements. In fact, there were also distinctions between two approaches and two visions. One of them was more exclusive, denominational, based upon well-defined articles of faith and rules, often dependent upon Western assistance and guidance, and lacking interest in the political activism. The other was decidedly non-denominational, advocating unity of the like-minded, relatively loose theologically, independent of foreign control, and focused upon overall religious, political, and social reformation.

Evangelical Christians, irrespective of their ethnicity, were heirs of the Evangelical tradition started by Pashkov and Korf, and continued by Ivan Prokhanov. They never were just an ethnic or local branch of another, larger and influential religious body. They felt themselves participants in a major project with social, political, and cultural implications. However, Russia did not become a land of Gospel Christianity, and

\textsuperscript{83} *Evangel’skaia vera*, 4 (1933): 14.
\textsuperscript{84} *Evangel’skaia vera*, 10-11 (1932): 16.
there was no mass conversion of Slavic peoples to the Gospel Christianity. After the deadly blow of Stalinist repression in the USSR in the late 1920s and 1930s, the Slavic Evangelical churches in the diaspora became the centre of the movement and the last hope of Prokhanov who still believed that they still had the capacity to become the seed of a new Reformation.
Chapter III. Ivan Prokhanov and Slavic Evangelical Christians outside Russia and the USSR

This chapter will outline the history of Evangelical Christians in the diaspora, after the break-up of the Russian Empire in 1917. First believers representing the Slavic Evangelical tradition, followers of Pashkov, resettled outside Russia in the late 19th and early 20th century. However, only after the Russian Revolution Slavic Evangelical Christians became a truly international or, rather, a transnational phenomenon. Transnationalism, understood in its most basic meaning, in the words of Steven Vertovec, as “the awareness of multilocality,”¹ is increasingly regarded as a useful approach in the study of immigrant groups and immigrant identities. Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen have recently explored transnationalism as part of the immigrant experience on the Canadian Prairies, which, as they argued, “increasingly charted their lives within social and cultural webs that had not just one centre, but two or even three.”² The new nest in Canada might serve as one point of reference, yet, the “gravitation centres” of the immigrant experiences often included the home country and, sometimes, a third country with which immigrants had economic, spiritual or other ties.

The transnationalist dimension is a highly useful approach to history of and the developments within the movement of Slavic Evangelicals in the diaspora. The movement as a collective body and many families and individual members that comprised it, especially in the period after both Russian Revolutions of 1917, coped with

¹ Steven Vertovec, Transnationalism (New York: Routledge, 2009), 7.
the feeling of “simultaneously being… ‘here and there.”’\textsuperscript{3} Cut off from their historical centre in St. Petersburg (Petrograd, then Leningrad), and from hundreds of thousands of their fellow-believers in the USSR, Slavic Evangelicals organized their national or local communities and unions from China to Paraguay, and from Canada to Australia, always claiming to be parts of the one Slavic Evangelical movement. Ivan Prokhanov, hectically living between Berlin, Poland, Bulgaria, New York, Chicago, Toronto, and Canadian Prairies, strove to shape those communities and unions into one manageable organization.

The official periodical of the Union, \textit{Evangel'skaia vera}, changed three places of publication (New York, then Berlin, and, finally, Tallinn, Estonia) in nine years from 1931 to 1940, while an increasing number of Slavic Evangelical Christians from Europe were making their new homes in Canada or Argentina. These recent settlers might simultaneously be ethnic Ukrainians, former Orthodox, Polish citizens, former subjects of the Russian Empire, Manitoba farmers, and members of a church of Slavic Evangelical Christians, who, on top of that, immigrated to Canada after years of life in South America.\textsuperscript{4} They at the same time felt deeply and genuinely worried about grain prices in Canada, helping to erect a new prayer house for a Slavic Evangelical church in Paraguay, members of which might be their cousins or former neighbours, closure of Evangelical Christian churches in Moscow by Soviet authorities, and the exchange rate of Canadian dollar to Polish zloty for their remittances to family back home.

In spite of the overshadowing significance of Ivan Prokhanov for Slavic Evangelical Christians during the first thirty-five years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the movement was sustainable enough to continue its existence and activities for generations beyond

\textsuperscript{3} Vertovec, \textit{Transnationalism}, 6.
\textsuperscript{4} Compare Loewen and Friesen, \textit{Immigrants in Prairie Cities}, 168-69.
Prokhanov’s death. The movement of Evangelical Christians, with its specific focus and vision, did not begin with Prokhanov. It started much earlier with the revival, ignited by Lord Radstock, and was carried on by Pashkov and Korf. Likewise, the death of Prokhanov did not signify the death of the movement. Communities existed in a number of countries at least until the end of the 20th century; the movement published periodicals, led missionary work, and readily engaged itself in interdenominational activities and such new methods of mission as radio broadcasting. The late 1940s and 1950s, that is, a decade or two after the death of Prokhanov were the period of the numerical peak of the movement in the diaspora.5

The reasons for the decline of the movement from the late 1950s or the 1960s onwards are to be sought on the path of transnational developments across the borders. The 1944 fusion of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR meant that the hope to reunite with the core membership in Russia “when the door opens” faded. Annexation of western Ukraine, western Belorussia, and Baltic States in 1939 and 1940 by the USSR signified that large masses of Slavic Evangelical Christians in those countries would have to join the new Evangelical Baptist union under the tight control of the Soviet rulers. Communities in Harbin, China, were dispersed following the Communist Revolution in China in 1949. Communities in South America were decimated over the post-war years because of continuing economic and political turmoil in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, when many members chose to emigrate elsewhere.

Of course, all these events per se could not destroy the movement. After all, many Evangelical Christians from China or Argentina were able to make it to North America,

5 See Chapter VII of this thesis for a detailed discussion of Slavic Evangelical Christians and North American evangelicalism.
while the USA and Canadian communities grew richer as their members overwhelmingly joined North American middle class. But what these events inadvertently signified was that the impulse at the core of the movement had failed. Slavic Evangelical Christians did not become the seed of the worldwide renewal of Christianity. The movement failed to convert a significant portion of the Russian or East Slavic population in exile. The members lost hope to ever spiritually and organizationally reunite with their brethren in the USSR or to be able to preach in that country. Finally, a high level of interdenominational integration of the movement with dominant evangelical culture in North America tacitly destroyed remaining barriers with the rest of evangelicals.

The main primary sources for this overview of the history of Slavic Evangelicals are periodicals of Evangelical Christians, published in different places at different times. They are *Khristianin* (until 1928, Saint Petersburg/Leningrad), *Evangel’skaia vera* (1931-1940, New York, Berlin, and Tallinn), and *Evangel’skoe slovo* (1962-1975, Chicago). For the purposes of this chapter *Evangel’skaia vera* is, perhaps, the most useful source, since it covers the efforts to re-group and reshape the movement in diaspora both by Prokhanov and after his death, and will be used most extensively.

**Ivan Prokhanov and Slavic Evangelical Christians Worldwide**

Two historical developments particularly contributed to the global spread of the Evangelical Christian movement. One of them was the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which caused an enormous outflow of refugees and emigrants from the former Russian Empire, mostly for political, but also for economical, religious, family, and other reasons.

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The other was the phenomenon of mass Ukrainian emigration to the New World at the
turn of the centuries and in the first half of the 20th century which was especially
important for the Canadian churches of Evangelical Christians. Although economics was
at the core of the latter development, such factors as discrimination against Ukrainians in
Austro-Hungary and, especially, Poland (after it regained its independence in 1918) and,
in some cases, political and personal considerations also played their role.

After the Revolution of 1917 Slavic Evangelical churches were founded in many
countries across the globe. A necessity was felt to re-establish ties among them, cut off by
political events. The editorial article in the first issue of *Evangel’skaia vera* called the
diaspora Evangelical Christians: “Whichever organizations may be helping you [in exile],
be thankful to all, but do not depart from the purity of the Gospel faith, confessed by the
evangelical movement in Russia… When the doors to Russia open, the evangelical
movement there and the evangelical movement here in exile will turn into one great
global river.”7 The magazine *Evangel’skaia vera* was thought of as “the linking chain in
this great unification… Let a brother, living in Shanghai, China suddenly, through the
magazine, hear the voice of a brother from Chicago or Brazil.”8

Dozens of the communities of Prokhanov’s Union were founded in newly
independent Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The Polish branch of the movement
was especially strong and numerous. A Conference of the “Union of Slavic Communities
of Evangelical Christians in Poland” which took place in Rovno (now Ukraine) in May,
1931, hosted 120 delegates from 49 communities with the total of 5117 members.9 The
word “Slavic” in the name of the organization, of course, denoted a multinational

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7 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 5.
8 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 1 (1931): 5.
character of the Union. Although Ukrainians were a majority, many Belorussians and Poles were also members of local churches. In fact, some of the leaders of the Polish church of the time, such as Liudvig Shenderovskii Sr. (Pol. Ludwig Szenderowski) and Frants Ventskevich (Pol. Franciszek Więckiewicz) were ethnic Poles of Roman Catholic background.\textsuperscript{10} News from the “Polish field” were regularly published in \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, and included reports of spiritual and business conferences, charitable undertakings such as the church-run orphanage in the city of Kovel’ (now Ukraine),\textsuperscript{11} and youth and literary church clubs,\textsuperscript{12} among other activities. Communities in Estonia and Latvia were also vital. A community in Revel’ (now Tallinn, Estonia) emerged long before the Revolution of 1917, due to its proximity to the centre of the movement in St. Petersburg. After the Estonian independence (1918) the small country became home to thousands of Russian refugees.\textsuperscript{13} The Riga (Latvia) community was growing, and had a choir and a youth group.\textsuperscript{14}

Personal involvement of Ivan Prokhanov gave an impulse to the founding of the Evangelical Union in Bulgaria in the early 1930s. Its members were ethnic Bulgarians, Macedonians, and Turks.\textsuperscript{15} A letter from “brother Kv.” from Bulgaria greeted the appearance of the new magazine, and assured that it would “find open doors in the hearts and homes of Russians and Bulgarian brothers who understand Russian.”\textsuperscript{16} Local Slavs were a missionary target, all the more that the Slavic Bulgarian language was relatively easy to learn, and due to the traditional friendliness of Bulgarian population towards

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 4-6 (1938): 19.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 8 (1933): 20.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 5 (1932): 13-14.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 4 (1932): 15.
\textsuperscript{15} Shenderovskii, \textit{Evangelical Christians}, 286-290.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Evangel’skaia vera}, 3 (1931): 10.
Russians. An anonymous report from Bulgaria informed that “a revival is noticeable among Macedonians and Thracian. I organize gatherings in the village K., in attendance of 150 and more souls.”\(^{17}\) Vital churches, including a community of Jewish Evangelical Christians, existed in Romania.\(^{18}\)

Evangelical Russian post-Revolutionary immigrants and refugees in Europe founded communities in Germany. In 1927 the community of Evangelical Christians in Berlin reported that it needed at least thirty copies of *Khristianin* for its members.\(^{19}\) Later Berlin became one of the two (along with New York) headquarters of the Slavic Evangelical Christians abroad. Prokhanov spent his last years following his departure from Russia (1928-1935) traveling between Berlin and New York, and visiting Evangelical communities worldwide. The large Berlin church had a choir, and was dynamically expending. One report said that on one occasion four new converts were baptized at once.\(^{20}\) From May, 1932 Berlin became the place of the publication of *Evangel’skaiia vera*.

Immigrants from Slavic lands founded in the 1920s a strong network of Slavic Evangelical churches in South America, which was at that time an important destination for European immigrants. Most of those churches were in Argentina, with some in Uruguay, Paraguay, and Brazil. The large Buenos Aires church included a youth groups which organized literary nights and had a string orchestra. The Sao Paolo, Brazil, church was much smaller. As of 1932 it counted twenty-seven members.\(^{21}\) Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay were important centres of the Ukrainian agricultural immigration from the

\(^{17}\) *Evangel’skaiia vera*, 2 (1931): 12.  
\(^{19}\) *Khristianin*, 5 (1927): 42, 43.  
\(^{20}\) *Evangel’skaiia vera*, 3 (1931): 11.  
\(^{21}\) *Evangel’skaiia vera*, 4 (1932): 12.
1880s. Many Slavic believers lived outside large cities, and were not organized into regular churches.\textsuperscript{22}

Churches of Slavic Evangelical Christians existed in China and Australia.\textsuperscript{23} Brother Rodkin from Harbin, China informed that “meetings at the new premises are numerous; we have conversions.”\textsuperscript{24} In September, 1931 the Chinese branch of the Evangelical Christian movement was officially organized. It united communities and groups in Harbin, the centre of the Russian diaspora in northern China at the time, in Hailar, Shanghai, and other cities. The missionary outreach was focused upon Russians, but not limited to them. Rodkin contacted a group of Tunghus (a semi-nomadic indigenous ethnic group in the borderlands of Russian Siberia and northern China), and preached Gospel to them.\textsuperscript{25}

The USA was an important centre of the Evangelical Christians in the diaspora from the early 1900s. Communities in Chicago and New York were especially influential.\textsuperscript{26} The worship premises of the Chicago church were emblematically known as The Gospel House (Rus. \textit{Dom Evangeliia}).\textsuperscript{27} Prokhanov first visited the USA in his young adult years, and had returned to that country for short or prolonged stays many times since. A 1927 issue contained a lengthy and detailed report of Prokhanov’s trip to North America mentioned on numerous occasions that Prokhanov attended and even preached in local Protestant churches. They included “like-minded spiritual societies and brotherhoods,” “Negro (negritionskie) Christian communities,” “gatherings of blacks and

\textsuperscript{22} Evangel'skaia vera, 2 (1931): 12.
\textsuperscript{23} Shenderovskii, \textit{Evangelical Christians}, 302-316, 348.
\textsuperscript{24} Evangel'skaia vera, 3 (1931): 11.
\textsuperscript{25} Evangel'skaia vera, 4 (1932): 13.
\textsuperscript{26} See a letter from the New York community of Evangelical Christians in \textit{Khristianin} 4 (1927): 62.
\textsuperscript{27} Evangel'skaia vera, 10-11 (1932): 12.
whites,” and “groups and communities of Russian believers.” Characteristically, no church he visited was referred to by the name of its respective denomination. In 1931-32 Prokhanov lived in the USA continuously, working on the formation of a worldwide Union. Creation of the new magazine, *Evangel’skaia vera*, dated back to that prolonged visit. Some aspects of the Evangelical Christian history in the USA will be treated below, in a section devoted to their relationship with the church of the Disciples of Christ.

Prokhanov’s dream was to convert all those scattered communities into what he envisioned as a Worldwide Union of Evangelical Christians. In fact, he thought that by the 1930s, following the establishment of the national unions in a dozen countries such a Worldwide Union had been already formed. Yet, he considered it impossible to officially proclaim the Worldwide Union when the contacts between the Evangelical Christians in the USSR and abroad were seriously curtailed.28 Considering the political climate of the time, the Union of Evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union could hardly obtain permission from the Government to participate in an organization influenced, if not dominated, by Evangelical churches from capitalist countries.

The fate of the believers in the USSR was an unceasing theme on the pages of *Evangel’skaia vera*. Two permanent sections of the magazine, “News from Russia” and “Persecution in Russia” were filled with reports received through a wide spectrum of official and unofficial sources, from official telegrams to scant letters to stories told by rare refugees from or visitors to the USSR. Carefully avoiding any direct political criticism, the magazine expressed a deep sympathy with fellow believers in the USSR and denounced Soviet religious (and, incidentally, political) persecutions. The “News” part primarily contained information received through official channels, and frequently

28 According to the spiritual will of Prokhanov quoted from Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 397.
was mildly optimistic. One report under the name “A Joyful News” informed that on 23rd of August, 1931 an officially permitted conference of the Council of Evangelical Christians took place in Moscow. According to another report from the north of Russia, a church was re-opened after seventeen months of closure, and worship meetings resumed. The “Persecution” section below contrasted sharply with the “News,” and contained mostly anonymous letters from various parts of the USSR. A believer from the Kiev province conveyed his collectivization experience in an apocalyptic language: “Such days have come for our country that you cannot describe them. They have taken from people everything they had: land, houses, all equipment, horses, cows, pigs, chicken, all food, freedom, and soul. The enemy has taken everything and wants everyone to bow before him. But this will not be!”

The church in the USSR, although communication with it was intermittent, was still listed on the pages of *Evangel’skaia vera* as a part of the one church along with diasporic branches.

**Slavic Evangelical Christians and the Disciples of Christ**

Numerous Slavic Evangelical communities appeared in the USA where John Johnson-Kondrat’ev became the first chairman of the USA branch of Prokhanov’s Union. The personality and life story of John Johnson was interwoven with another important, but little-known episode in the history of Evangelical Christians, their connections to the American restorationist movement of the Disciples of Christ (Church of Christ). The history of relationship between Slavic Gospel Christians and the American Disciples of Christ was studied by two Disciple historians, Geoffrey Ellis and Wesley Jones. The result of their research, which included two trips to Russia, was published as a book entitled *The Other Revolution: Russian Evangelical Awakening* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996). Although being designed more as a popular historical book than an academic work, *The Other Revolution* nevertheless drew upon numerous archival materials and

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29 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 3 (1931): 12.
31 The history of relationship between Slavic Gospel Christians and the American Disciples of Christ was studied by two Disciple historians, Geoffrey Ellis and Wesley Jones. The result of their research, which included two trips to Russia, was published as a book entitled *The Other Revolution: Russian Evangelical Awakening* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996). Although being designed more as a popular historical book than an academic work, *The Other Revolution* nevertheless drew upon numerous archival materials and
Disciples movement that advocated the return to the New Testament and the primitive church of the apostolic times emerged in the USA in the early 19th century during the Second Great Awakening. Among the most important tenets of the Disciples is the absence of written creeds while the believers are only required to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and undergo baptism by immersion. The Disciples have always made a special effort to remain non-denominational and never proclaimed that belonging to their community was essential for salvation. They have been active in the ecumenical movement of Christian churches. The motto of the 19th century Disciples was the following saying of St. Augustine: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.” This phrase Prokhanov chose for the slogan of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians. However, the links between the American Disciples and Slavic Evangelical Christians go far beyond using the same motto.32

The first Disciple mission for Slavic-speaking people and the first Russian Disciple church were founded in New York by a Pahkovite believer Ivan Kondrat’ev who was exiled to Transcaucasia in 1893 with his father, and managed to immigrate to the USA in 1903. He anglicized his name upon naturalization and became known as John Johnson. In 1904 John Johnson (Kondrat’ev) joined the Disciples of Christ. In 1910 his Russian Christian Mission in New York City grew enough to become a church. Aleksandr Persianov, a prominent missionary worker of the Union of Evangelical Christians, met Johnson-Kondrat’ev’s father on one of his missionary trips in Siberia. The father told Persianov about his son’s missionary work in America among Slavic people, and Persianov started a correspondence with Johnson. As a result Timofei

hard to find contemporary sources, including the Disciple press dating back to the first quarter of the 20th century.
32 Ellis, Jones, The Other Revolution, 142.
Davydov, an elder of the Russian Disciple church in New York, attended the 3rd Congress of Evangelical Christians in 1911 and spoke to the delegates. Besides, leaders of the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS) and the Disciples’ Mission Union sent telegrams of greetings to the Congress. In 1912 Joseph Keevil of the Disciples’ Mission Union wrote a letter to Ivan Prokhanov asking him to outline the faith of the Evangelical Christians. Prokhanov answered the letter, and as a result Prokhanov and two representatives of the Evangelical Christians, Persianov and Schmidt, attended the annual meeting of the ACMS. Prokhanov addressed the gathering with a speech. The American Disciples formed a Russian Emergency Committee that set a goal of collecting 5000 dollars towards the expenses of setting up the Bible College in Saint Petersburg, an initiative of Ivan Prokhanov. The chairman of the Committee was Z.T. Sweeney who considered Evangelical Christians a very likeminded group. He wrote, “There is no doubt that these Evangelical Christians of Russia are our own spiritual kith and kin. They are the Disciples of Christ in Russia.” The funds collected by the Disciples (slightly over $5000) were used towards the expenses of the Bible College.

The years of the First World War (1914-1918) and the Russian Civil War (1917-early 1920s) interrupted the dialogue between the Disciples and Evangelical Christians for a time. It resumed immediately after the Civil War was over. The American Disciples helped Russia during the famine that struck parts of the country following the end of the Civil War. In 1923 Karl Borders, a Disciple leader and relief worker from Chicago visited Russia to get acquainted with the Evangelical Christians and evaluate whether their beliefs and practices were identical to those of the Disciples. Another delegation of

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33 Ellis, Jones, The Other Revolution, 148-50.
34 Ellis, Jones, The Other Revolution, 149.
the Disciples commissioners went to Russia again for the same purpose in 1925. Their practical aim was to determine whether the Disciples were to fund the Bible School of the Evangelical Christians and their other endeavours. Prokhanov, who happened to be in the USA in May, 1925, met members of that committee shortly before their departure for Russia. According to Ellis and Jones, “the American assessment was that the Russian Evangelical Christians were *neither Baptists nor Disciples* and, in significant points, were not fully restorationist according to the American standards.”35 Thus the decision was made to refrain from any substantial funding of the Bible College, although the Disciples continued to help Prokhanov’s Union financially until the Stalinist reaction of late 1920s curtailed any contacts between the USSR and the West. This relationship, in a sense, illustrates the whole paradigm of the position of the Slavic Gospel Christians towards Western Protestants. On one hand, there is an obvious affinity and a great degree of similarity and mutual sympathy, but on the other hand, Western Protestants, be it Baptists or the Disciples of Christ, sensed that Slavic Gospel Christians were an alternative form of Protestantism. They saw that the Evangelical Christians, although invariably ready for co-operation, would never become part of their church structure or accept foreign control over their affairs. This inevitably led to cautious or scarce support of any kind, and, as a result, Slavic Evangelical Christians, unlike Slavic Baptists, had to rely upon themselves. The subsequent chapters will demonstrate how this paradigm played out in the case of Canadian Evangelical Christians, and, specifically, in the Benito church.

Andrew Blane and some other researchers of Russian religious dissent regarded Evangelical Christians as part of the Baptist movement based on the fact that Prokhanov and his collaborators took part in the activities of the World Baptist Alliance (Prokhanov

35 Ellis, Jones, *The Other Revolution*, 172.
was a long time Vice-President of the WBA). Now the question could arise whether participation in the Disciples of Christ activities (of which Andrew Blane was likely not aware), such as participation in their conferences as well as accepting funding from them was a good enough reason to consider them a part of the Disciples. The legitimate answer in both cases, of course, would be no. Slavic Evangelical Christians were neither Disciples nor Baptists, as it was noted by the Disciples’ committee. However, their staunchly non-denominational stance and openness to contacts with anyone who proclaimed salvation through Christ allowed them a close association with those bodies, but that openness is not to be confused with their sameness.

A lengthy statement of faith and purpose of the Evangelical Christians under the title “A Brotherly Word to All Christian Churches and Confessions Worldwide” was signed by Ivan Prokhanov, Iakov Zhidkov, Ivan Kargel’ and other leaders of the movement in the USSR in 1928. It was, according to Prokhanov, “made known” in 1930, but published only in 1933 in *Evangel’skaia vera*. It said: “As the construction of the Russian evangelical church began, there could have been a wish to simply accept the shape of an existing kindred church. Some groups of believers in Russia did so, having accepted the name and organization of a foreign confession… But the Apostolic plan tells not to move from elsewhere, but to build up a spiritual house. Maintaining our respect to all kindred Protestant churches…, we preferred an independent construction of a spiritual house.”

In the meantime the Slavic Disciple congregation in New York withdrew in 1925 to join the emerging Slavic Union of Evangelical Christians in America of which John Johnson (Kondrat’ev) became a President. A history of the Slavic Evangelical Christians

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by Liudvig Shenderovskii is silent on the links with the Disciples of Christ, although it contains a section devoted to John Johnson. According to Shenderovskii, Johnson founded that church in 1907, and not in 1910 as indicated by Ellis and Jones, and was ordained as a minister (apparently, by the Disciples of Christ) in 1910. According to Shenderovskii, Johnson “in 1912 organized the first conference of Evangelical Christians in New York.” Johnson met Prokhanov in person only in 1931. They began co-operating, with Johnson “uniting” his magazine *Golos Evangeliia* (Voice of the Gospel) with the *Evangel’skaia Vera* (The Gospel Faith) magazine, published by Prokhanov. Indeed, John Johnson was listed as an assistant editor of *Evangel’skaia vera* in 1931-32 until publication of the magazine was moved to Berlin. Finally, in the early 1930s he became an employee of the American branch of the Union of Evangelical Christians. In other words, Shenderovskii’s account reads as if Johnson were an Evangelical Christian and there was a community of Slavic Evangelical Christians in New York even prior to the emergence of the Prokhanov’s Union of Evangelical Christians in Russia! There is no reason to doubt the account of Ellis and Jones regarding Johnson, based on the Disciple sources of the period. Apparently, Shenderovskii did not pay enough attention to verifying Johnson’s initial denominational affiliation, and, in all probability, did not know much about the movement of the Disciples of Christ/Christian Church in the USA. He must have taken the name “Christian Church” in whichever source he used as a descriptor or a modifier rather than as an official title of a denomination. On the other hand, Shenderovskii’s confusion (as

38 Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 333.
well as Johnson’s behaviour) is very remarkable. Both cases illustrate the degree of openness of the Evangelical Christians towards other denominations, non-denominationalism, but also their unwillingness to compromise their independence in favour of a close affiliation with larger and richer religious organizations.

**Slavic Evangelical Christians Worldwide after Prokhanov**

The only issue of *Evangel’skaia vera* that appeared in 1936 was devoted entirely to the memory of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov who died in October, 1935. It contained his detailed biography by Evangelical author and intellectual Vladimir Martsinkovskii, obituaries written by Ludwig Jacques (also spelled Liudvig Zhak) and anonymous authors, and a lengthy “spiritual will” of Prokhanov, outlining the principles and tasks of the Evangelical Christian movement in the future. The Prokhanov’s spiritual will, written in 1933 in Wernigerode, Germany, called for formation of new local and national unions of Evangelical Christians worldwide, intensified preaching and evangelization, and cooperation with other like-minded Christians, especially Baptists. Although preaching was to be focused on Russian and Slavic population, other nations were expected to convert through the preaching efforts of Evangelical Christians. Ludwig Jacques and Jakob Kroeker were designated as future chairman and deputy chairman of the Union.

Among the numerous churches, organizations, and private persons who sent their condolences on the occasion of Prokhanov’s death were the American Bible Society and the community of Doukhobors in Canada. Following the death of Prokhanov in 1935 in Berlin, his successors in the Slavic Evangelical movement abroad decided to officially...

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39 *Evangel’skaia vera* 1-12 (1936): 4-14.
organize the Worldwide Union even though Evangelical Christians in the USSR had no opportunity to join that organizations or even participate in its activities. The Soviet branch of the movement was expected to join the new Union “when the doors to Russia open.” The decision to organize the Worldwide Union was taken in January 1936 under the leadership of Jakob Kroeker (also spelled Iakov Kreker) (1872-1948) and Ludwig Jacques (1878-1939), both Russian Evangelical activists of German origin.42 Both Kroeker and Jacques became leaders of the movement in accordance with Prokhanov’s spiritual will.43 The first conference of the new Fellowship was held on 15th to 19th of May, 1937 in Warsaw, Poland.44 Of course, the imminent tragic war events in Europe stopped the Slavic Evangelical activities in most of Europe. In 1939 Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany, while the eastern part of the country, where most Evangelical Christians lived, was annexed by the Soviet Union and became part of Ukraine and Belorussia. In 1940 Estonia and Latvia, the countries that housed a considerable number of Evangelical Christians, were annexed by the USSR and became republics within the Soviet Union. Later Evangelical Christians residing in those lands had to join the AUCECB. Most Evangelical Christians remaining in Poland united in 1953 into one church with the Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals). The former headquarters of Evangelical Christians in Berlin was destroyed in 1944 by Ally airplanes bombing the city, and the archives that were stored in the building burnt down.45 After the war many

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42 Ludwig Jacques was born in Germany, graduated from the Faculty of Theology of the University at Halle, and arrived in Russia in 1906, where he remained until 1918 (see his biography in Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 449-50). Jakob Kroeker was a Russian-born Mennonite who immigrated to Germany in 1908, and devoted the rest of his life to the ministry among Russian-speaking people in the diaspora. His biography by A. Borisov was published in Vera i zhizn’ (Faith and Life) 5 (1996), and is available online at http://www.lio.ru/archive/vera/96/05/article06.html (URL accessed on August 24, 2010).
43 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 391-397.
45 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 292.
post-Revolutionary Russian exiles residing in Europe, including Evangelical believers, chose to immigrate to the Americas. The centre of the Worldwide Fellowship shifted to North America. At first the influx of the post-war Slavic newcomers kept the organization active, however from the 1960s onwards its membership and the range of its activities were constantly shrinking. The headquarters of the organization was moved to Chicago, Illinois and was incorporated as a charity under the name of the World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians Inc. with Evangel’skoe slovo quarterly as its official magazine.

Each issue of Evangel’skoe slovo contained a list of established churches of Evangelical Christians in a number of countries. The list included as of the period from 1962 to 1966 seventeen churches in Canada, fourteen – in the USA, nine – in Argentina, two – in Finland, and one church each in Uruguay, Australia, and Switzerland.

Evangel’skoe slovo of the period published a number of letters from affiliates or sympathizers of the Fellowship from different countries. Of course, most such letters and reports came from the countries and localities with existing Slavic Evangelical communities. Other, however, arrived from Russia (apparently, from anywhere in the USSR), France, Poland, Germany, and Brazil. For readers in such countries as Brazil and France receiving Evangel’skoe slovo in the mail was the main way to maintain contact with the larger body of Slavic Evangelicals. I. Voitsitskii from Brazil wrote: “Once again in this year a dear guest and a missionary – Evangel’skoe slovo – visited my home.”

N.D. Novatskii from France and A. Raslanas from Germany similarly expressed gratitude.

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46 Legal data pertaining to the World Fellowship are available online at http://www.manta.com/coms2/dnbcompany_98nly1 (URL accurate as of July 28 2009).
for “being able to read about Lord’s work in *Evangel’ skoe slovo*.” The magazine often published materials about pastoral trips and visits involving guests from abroad. Obviously, contacts between believers in the USA and Canada were the most frequent ones, but trips of Ivan Guk from Canada to the USSR and Poland, and of a preacher from Poland A. Baenskii to the USA, among others, were also reported. The World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians acted in accordance with its title, striving to unite and co-ordinate Slavic Evangelicals worldwide.

In the 1970s John (Ivan) Sergey (1917-2008) became its President, in which position he remained until his death in December, 2008. The present leadership and activities of the Fellowship are unknown, and there is a reason to believe that the organization is virtually dormant.

**Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada**

The first Russian religious immigrants to Canada were the Doukhobors who often entered into close contact with Slavic Evangelical Christians. In 1898 Prokhanov, at that time residing in London, was asked to go to Cyprus in order to provide assistance to the Doukhobors. In the 1890s a large group of the radical Doukhobors, participants of a revival caused by the Tolstoyan ideas of Christian anarchism, pacifism, and vegetarianism, was subject to governmental repression in the Caucasus where they had lived. Leo Tolstoy and his circle aided by British Quakers, proposed emigration from Russia as a means to solve their clash with the Tsarist government. Canada agreed to

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accept that group of refugees for subsequent resettlement in the Prairie Provinces since it badly needed agricultural settlers at that time. But the first group of the Doukhobor emigrants had decided to leave Russia before Canada agreed to admit them in late 1898. They left in the summer of 1898 for the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, governed at that time by the British. According to Prokhanov, the Doukhobors were en route to Canada, but had to disembark on Cyprus because an epidemic broke out among them.

Prokhanov was asked to go to Cyprus by one of the members of the Committee formed to rescue the Doukhobors, a British Quaker named Brooks. According to Prokhanov himself, “my duties were to look after the general condition of the Doukhobors, to secure improvements, and to help them with their medicine.” In addition, Prokhanov taught the younger Doukhobors the English language. Prokhanov spoke about the Doukhobors and their cause with much sympathy. His work was of a purely humanitarian nature, and, as Prokhanov wrote, “By doing this work I attained some intimate relations with them.”

Later, when Prokhanov met Doukhobors on his trips to Slavic Evangelical churches in Canada, he received thanks from those who had remembered him from their time on Cyprus. Prokhanov wrote a lengthy article on the Doukhobors and his time on Cyprus for Evangel’skaia vera. There he confessed: “Even the Christians who do not agree with Doukhobors highly respect basic doctrines of their teaching about stopping all wars and usefulness of the communal lifestyle. I acquired my respect for Doukhobors from my personal relationship with them. Moreover, I feel part of one family with them.”

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53 Prokhanoff, In the Cauldron of Russia, 107.
54 Prokhanoff, In the Cauldron of Russia, 111.
55 Evangel’skaia vera, 8-9 (1934): 27.
So it happened that Doukhobors and Evangelical Christians in Canada often were neighbours. The Doukhobor village in Saskatchewan, called Vozvyshenienie, was founded by a group of so called Independent Doukhobors who forsook the communal lifestyle, and filed individual homestead entries under the Homestead Act. The village came into existence in 1902, and already in 1904 it became a temporary home for a group of Russian and Ukrainian Evangelical believers from near Kiev who came to Canada in search of religious freedom. Remarkably, the newcomers, just like the Doukhobors, called themselves “spiritual Christians”!

This was probably the first contact of the Doukhbors with Slavic Gospel Christians in Canada. *Khristianin*, which served as the official magazine of the All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union until 1928, contained an account of one of Prokhanov’s visits to Canada that took place in July of 1926, that is, a few years prior to the arrival of Slavic Gospel Christians in Benito. The outline of his itinerary in Canada (Purdue and Blain Lake, Saskatchewan, and Brilliant, British Columbia) reveals that Prokhanov did not visit any of the numerous Ukrainian Baptist churches, and limited his trip mainly to Doukhobor settlements. The article in *Khristianin* devoted a section to an introduction of the Doukhobors and their life in Canada to the Russian reader. Notably, the article did not contain a word of criticism of the Doukhobor doctrine and practice. At the same time, Prokhanov preached to the Doukhobors and held numerous meetings with them. The article said that Doukhobors had remained “orphans” after the death of their leader Petr Verigin in 1923. Such an energetic attempt on behalf of Prokhanov to extend

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57 Kindrat, *Ukrainian Baptist Movement*, 74.
58 *Khristianin*, 7 (1927): 38-44.
his care to the Doukhobors pointed to his hopes to convert them to Evangelical Christianity.

The Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical church of Benito likewise emerged in the close proximity to a major cluster of the Doukhobor population in the town of Kamsack, Saskatchewan.59 The large town of Kamsack, served as a trading and cultural centre for the surrounding villages, hamlets, and farms, including Benito. Shenderovskii’s account of Prokhanov’s visit to the Canadian Prairies in 1934 suggests that the leader of the Slavic Evangelical Christians came to visit members of his Union and also the Doukhobors: “In 1934 I.S. Prokhanov… visited communities of the Evangelical Christians in Western Canada and the communities of the Doukhobors with whom he was on the island of Cyprus in 1899 during their migration to Canada and the epidemics, helping them and caring for them. They respected him very much, and gladly received him in Canada.”60 The relationship between the Doukhobors and Evangelical Christians in the area was exceptionally friendly, and it was marked with mutual respect, aid, and intermixing through conversion and marriage. Another case of the same sort is the story of the Slavic Evangelical church in the town of Castlegar, British Columbia, the stronghold of the Canadian Doukhobors.

As compared to the Baptist branch, the Slavic Evangelical movement displayed a much higher degree of closeness with the old Russian dissenting sects of the Spiritual Christians, such as the Molokans and the Doukhobors. Theologically, Evangelical

59 The initial Doukhobor bloc settlement near Kamsack was once the Doukhobor North Reserve. See Carl J. Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), 128-134. The town of Veregin, the former residence of the Doukhobor leader Petr Vasil’evich Verigin and the present site of a Doukhobor Heritage Village, is just a few kilometres north of Kamsack.
60 Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 325.
Christians had a strong “spiritualist” tendency and a less structured pattern of a church management and organization. No rituals were deemed necessary and even such crucial rituals as baptism or laying on of hands were often interpreted in a spiritualist manner. Historically, Evangelical Christians found a mutually enriching *modus vivendi* with the communities of Spiritual Christians. Obvious differences were acknowledged, but they were not a hindrance for co-operation and communication based upon respect and awareness of common spiritual roots.

The Evangelical pioneers in Canada and the USA (Pashkovites and Ukrainian Stundists) arrived in the first years of the 20th century. Often Evangelical believers scattered across vast territories of Canada, could not satisfactorily organize regular church life and, therefore, had to join other similar religious communities (mostly English Baptist, later Ukrainian Baptist) in order to find a church home. Prokhanov’s Union was not there to help them and their relatively small numbers and economic weakness did not allow for a viable community structure. At that, the homestead structure did not particularly favour close-knit communities as the newcomers had to live quite far from each other. The attempts of some religiously motivated settlers to introduce an alternative

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61 Compare, for instance, the treatment of the ordinance of baptism in the *Articles of faith of the Russian Baptists* (Rostov-na-Donu: Tipografia F.P. Pavlova, 1906) and those of the Prokhanovite Union (Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 480). The former understands baptism as an external ordinance of great importance: “We believe that… established by Jesus Christ holy baptism should be continued by the believers till the Second Coming. The baptism is performed by a designated minister of the Lord, and consists of a momentary immersion… of a baptisant into the water.” The latter contains the following description where water baptism is subordinate to that of the Spirit: “The Word of God teaches us of two types of baptism: 1) spiritual [baptism], and 2) water [baptism]… The water baptism is an external sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit that had taken place earlier in one’s soul.” By the way of a further comparison, a Molokan theological treatise (S.K. Zhabin, *Toward the Spiritual World*, translated and published by Daniel H. Shubin, 1994), says: “We, spiritual Christians, recognize two baptisms: one is the bodily - John’s baptism. The other is the spiritual of which John himself said, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’ The first baptism -John the Baptist’s - was adapted from the Old Covenant: it has significance only for the adherents of the Old Covenant: the letter and superficial ceremonies. The true worshippers of the New Covenant church of Christ must worship God spiritually.”

pattern of resettlement often resulted in a conflict with Canadian authorities. Such was the situation with the Hutterites and the Doukhobors for whom communal living was part of their faith.

Individuals, families and, possibly, small groups of Slavic Evangelical Christians existed in Western Canada alongside the bigger and stronger Baptist movement. Evangelical Christians were devoid of direct and substantial help from English and German Protestants, and disorganized internally. The Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada became vital only when large masses of people from the former Russian part of Poland (now western Belorussia, eastern Poland, and parts of Ukraine) started to immigrate to Canada. There were Evangelical Christians, members of Prokhanov’s Union, among them. It is important to analyze what made this type of immigrants distinct from Ruthenians and Galicians. Firstly, early Evangelical Christians in Canada, although predominantly Ukrainians and Belorussians ethnically, and citizens of Poland at the time of arrival, came from the areas that used to be part of the former Russian Empire prior to its collapse and the independence of Poland. Galicians and Ruthenians came from provinces that were part of Austro-Hungary, later Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, and never belonged to the Russian Empire. This meant that the Evangelical Christians had a much stronger affinity with Russia, its culture, and its people. Their spiritual heritage took shape alongside, and according to the similar pattern with that of Russia. Many of them converted in the old country and belonged to the communities of Prokhanov’s

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64 Barbara Skinner examined the confessional roots of the division between Uniate (Ukrainian Catholic) and Orthodox Ukrainians and pointed to “religious conflict as a key causal factor” of a tension between the groups, at times amounting to violence. See “Borderlands of Faith: Reconsidering the Origins of a Ukrainian Tragedy,” Slavic Review, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 89.
Union. Western parts of the former Russian empire, which later became part of the independent Polish state, were home to thousands of Evangelical believers. According to the history of Evangelical Christianity in Volhynia from the AUCECB archives (now Rovno, Volyn’ and Zhitomir provinces of Ukraine), the Evangelical movement in the region dates back to 1867. The first converts represented a mix of ethnicities and religious backgrounds, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutherans, Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, and Germans. Many of the members of the Benito church were born or had family roots in Volhynia. When the Evangelical Union took shape under the leadership of Prokhanov, many of the Volhynia communities became part of the Union. For example, the community of Evangelical Christians in the city of Kovel’ was officially registered in 1908 under the name of The Society of Evangelists (Obshchestvo Evangelistov).

According to the Ministry of Interior report as of 1908, evaluating loyalty of the group, members of the Society used religious literature printed and brought from Saint-Petersburg, and “the essence of their faith is to know the true God and serve him without any church ritual.” Last names of the members reveal the same complex ethnic composition, characterised by the prevailing Ukrainian component with a high percentage of Poles and Russians.

Between the two world wars the number of Evangelical Christians in eastern Poland was increasing due to the activity of the Polish Union of Evangelical Christians, the branch of the Prokhanovite church in Poland. Many of them joined masses of their compatriots, mostly of Ukrainian and Belorussian ethnicity, in their journey to Canada.

Soon Evangelical Christians in Canada faced the necessity to co-ordinate their efforts to maintain their faith and preach to others. The initiator of this work was Ignatii Stepanovich Sidorchuk, (b. 1883 near Pinsk, Belorussia) who first came to Canada in 1912 as a citizen of Russia, then returned home in 1914, and re-immigrated to Canada in 1927 when Pinsk was already part of Poland. Due to the efforts of Sidorchuk and other Evangelical activists the first conference of Evangelical Christians took place in Toronto from 25th to 27th of September, 1930. Fifteen delegates represented Western Canada, Montréal, Hamilton, Toronto and Brantford. Two special guests that participated in the Conference were John Johnson-Kondrat’ev, an early Russian Evangelical (Pashkovite) immigrant to the USA who was associated for a time with the Disciples of Christ, and Oswald Smith, a famous Canadian pastor and evangelist. Ivan Prokhanov also sent his greetings. The delegates agreed to establish the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada as a branch of the worldwide community of Slavic Evangelical churches. Much to the benefit of this undertaking, Ivan Prokhanov spent most of the period from 1930 to 1934 in North America, organizing communities, and conducting fund-raising campaigns. Prokhanov took the responsibility of legal registration of the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada as a charitable organization. In 1933 Prokhanov visited communities of Slavic Evangelicals in Lizard Lake, Saskatchewan, Glendon, Alberta, and Benito, Manitoba, and participated in so called spiritual and edifying conferences (dukhovno-nazidatel’nyi s’ezd) in these localities.

67 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 325, 329.
68 On Oswald Smith please see http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/smith01.htm (The URL is accurate as of 20 July 2009, and includes links to audio files with samples of Smith’s preaching).
69 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 325-326; Church in the Valley, 15.
Conferences were held by the Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians annually. The first chairman of the union was Ignatii Sidorchuk (1930-40) with a break in 1934-35 when Ivan Prokhanov was formally the chairman of the Canadian Union. The peak of the activities and the numerical strength of the Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians dates back to 1945-1955. The following decades were a story of a gradual decline of the Slavie Evangelical movement in Canada. As of the early 1960s there were seventeen Slavie Evangelical churches in Canada. However, as of 1980 the Union had only twelve functioning communities across Canada. Three of them were located in Ontario (Toronto, Brantford, and London), three in Alberta (Edmonton, Bonnyville, and Glendon), three in Saskatchewan (Biggar, Saint Walburg, and Kuroki), two in British Columbia (Castlegar and Kelowna), and one in Manitoba (Benito). Currently the organization is practically dormant. The Canadian Revenue Agency’s charity listings still show the Union of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada as a registered charity, but its activities appear to be minimal. The following chapters will be devoted to the last of the mentioned Canadian churches, the Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians in Benito.

Role and Significance of Ivan Prokhanov for the Slavic Evangelical Movement

Undoubtedly, Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov possessed a charismatic personality. His influence over his followers and even many people outside of the Evangelical Christians’ fold was strong and lasting. There is no reason to doubt that during his lifetime Prokhanov’s authority in the Union of Evangelical Christians was indisputable. However, the question may be raised to what extent the movement of the Evangelical

70 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 330-331.
Christians was Prokhanov’s personal project and whether the existence of the Slavic Evangelical Christian movement was dependent upon its leader for its separate existence.

Of course, the role of Ivan Prokhanov in the emergence of the diaspora church of Slavic Evangelical Christians was very important. Yet, no personal efforts of one man, no matter how capable and energetic, could possibly mould into one union ethnically diverse communities from all over the world without their express will. Prokhanov’s pastoral travels were limited to Europe and North America; he had never been to South America, Australia, or China that were home to many Slavic Evangelical Christians. Sometimes accidental copies of Evangel’skaia vera prompted isolated groups of Slavic Evangelical Christians to contact the wider Union and, eventually, join it. One report read:

“Increasingly more brothers and sisters we encounter in diverse parts of the world through Evangel’skaia vera. This way, for example, we got into contact with Evangelical Russian brethren, stranded in far-away Paraguay in South America.”71 Another report a few months later devoted a large section to the Paraguayan communities, which had dozens of members (48 in one church and 35 in another) and even extended missionary outreach to Paraguayan indigenous tribes.72 Even though Prokhanov’s personal energy was instrumental in the creation of the diaspora church, it was the grass-roots initiative and the desire to re-establish a link with fellow believers worldwide that made it happen.

It would be a mistake to think that Evangelical Christians dwelt upon the personality of Prokhanov, or exceedingly depended upon his ideological or literary legacy after his death. The movement of the Evangelical Christians continued its existence for many years after Prokhanov’s death, from 1935 until well into the 21st

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71 Evangel’skaia vera, 7 (1932): 11.
72 Evangel’skaia vera, 10-11 (1932): 16-17.
century. Moreover, the peak of membership and activities of the Slavic Evangelical Christian brotherhood in the diaspora fell on the years after Prokhanov’s death, the 1940s and 1950s. The World Fellowship of Evangelical Christians with headquarters in Chicago served as a worldwide centre of the Evangelical Christians. This centre published periodicals, co-ordinated the activities of national unions and isolated groups, and organized Union-wide events such as conferences and training courses for ministers. There was no charismatic figure comparable in influence with Ivan Prokhanov in the movement, and the affairs of the brotherhood were managed collegially.

It is useful to look at the official publication of the World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians in the 1960s and 70s, Evangel’skoe slovo, to determine to what extent the figure of Prokhanov maintained its once monumental significance for later generations of believers. It will be particularly useful to contrast that magazine with Khristantin of 1926-27. These years were chosen, because it was the time when Prokhanov was still a full of life unquestionable head of the largest and thriving Protestant church in the USSR, while religion still enjoyed a fair degree of freedom in the country.

The theme of the personal role of Ivan Prokhanov is present in the issues of Khristantin of the period. According to a letter written by Egorov, a Russian Evangelical Christian resident in Canada on occasion of Prokhanov’s visit to North America in 1925, it “caused an indescribable joy. Some people here call him [Prokhanov] a new apostle Paul.”73 A group of believers from near Kharkov wrote that they “strive to accomplish what dear brother Prokhanov wrote about [in Khristantin].”74 Virtually each issue of

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73 Khristantin, 5 (1927): 42.
*Khristianin* began with an opening poem, or, sometimes, a song by Ivan Prokhanov. Practically all issues contained pieces penned by Prokhanov, such as poems and sermons, along with reports about Prokhanov’s pastoral trips. In the Issue 1 as of 1927 three first pieces in a row were authored by Prokhanov, a New Year address to readers, a poem, and a sermon. A reader of *Khristianin* with no prior knowledge of the situation within the Union of Evangelical Christians would very soon realize that the figure of Prokhanov far surpassed in importance anyone else in the Union. Characteristically, articles by Iakov Zhidkov were virtually absent from *Khristianin* (no articles by Zhidkov in the entire year of 1927, for example), although Zhidkov was co-editor of the magazine along with Prokhanov, and became chairman of the AUCECB in 1944.

*Evangel’skoe slovo* as of 1960s, that is, at least a generation after Prokhanov’s death, is to a high degree similar to *Khristianin* in some respects. The long-standing tradition of staunch non-denominationalism remained. Evangelical Christians of 1960s perceived themselves as a part of a larger historical process endowed with a special mission. *Evangel’skoe slovo* saw its particular mission in co-ordinating the efforts of national unions and churches and providing pastoral care to groups, and individual Slavic Evangelical Christians all over the world.

An analysis of the issues of *Evangel’skoe slovo* in possession of this author (1962-1966) reveals that the personality or memory of Prokhanov did not play a significant role in the publications of the magazine. Direct references to Prokhanov were very rare and incidental in nature. On one occasion Prokhanov was mentioned as one of a number of “great reformers of Christianity” along with John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Martin Luther,

Calvin, Moody, Spurgeon, Kargel’ and Pavlov. Remarkably, Vasilii Pavlov (1856-1924) also referred to as a “great reformer” was the chairman of the Union of Russian Baptists from 1909, that is, at the time when personal tensions between Prokhanov and leaders of the Russian Baptists Union were at their peak. On another occasion the magazine gave credit to Prokhanov for establishing the tradition of the annual “prayer week” among Evangelical Christians. Evangel’skoe slovo offered for sale Christian hymnbooks (Gusli, Timpany, Kimvvaly, and others), which contained hymns composed, translated, or edited by Ivan Prokhanov, without an indication of authorship. The administration of the World Fellowship was collegial, and although 6-8 names of Slavic Evangelical leaders from important communities (Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto, and Buenos Aires) were mentioned frequently, the Fellowship clearly did not have a single leader.

In spite of the importance of the charismatic leadership of Prokhanov during a certain period of time, the movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians after his death was a vital and sustainable organization for a long period of time. Further, the movement at a later period was not dependent upon the person of Prokhanov for the legitimization of its existence or activities. The World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians maintained main principles of the Prokhanovite movement, such as emphasized non-denominationalism, a sense of being a part of the world evangelicalism, a focus upon a particular mission to Slavic peoples, and a global vision. At the same time, the importance of Prokhanov as a person, so prominent initially, faded when he was no longer the leader of the community.

Conclusion

The history of the communities of Evangelical Christians scattered across Canada and other lands is best interpreted in the context of transnational developments which simultaneously involved more than one physical, cultural, and political point of reference. Slavic Evangelicals in the diaspora by nature were a transnational community. Thus, to satisfactorily explain what was happening in a specific rural locality in Manitoba, one would need to consider events, people, and developments taking place thousands of miles away in wholly different social, political, and cultural setting. Loewen and Friesen argued that “transnational ties could provide financial resources, social networks, and spiritual and mythological truths.”78 They could also, at least to a degree, affect the vitality of an immigrant community. The next chapters are a tale of how this intertwinement of local, national, and transnational contexts was reflected in the life of one church in the Canadian hinterlands from late 1920s until the end of the 20th century.

Chapter IV. The Beginnings: 1928-1945

This chapter is devoted to the first period in the life of the Russian-Ukrainian church of Evangelical Christians in Benito, that is, from late 1920s to the end of World War II. This was the period when a small group of newcomers with very limited resources, but great enthusiasm, formed a congregation and expanded. In spite of the hardships and challenges, they were able to survive, establish themselves, and emerge as a cohesive ethno-religious community.

It will be necessary to provide some relevant geographical and historical background information related to the village of Benito, the area that surrounds the village, and the history of its settlement. The Slavic immigration into the area is especially important for this story. Then we will deal with the organizing of the community, the motivations and goals of the newcomers who had formed the church, their ethnic and linguistic background, and their economic circumstances. This chapter will offer an explanation as to why the church from early on formally identified itself a Russian-Ukrainian one, although Russians were only a small minority compared to Ukrainians both in the Province of Manitoba and within the Benito church community. The chapter will also analyze why the community chose to become a part of numerically weak Prokhanov’s Union of Evangelical Christians in spite of the fact that Manitoba and Saskatchewan were home to numerous Ukrainian Baptist churches.¹

¹ James Woodsworth’s writings provide factual material on the Canadian attitudes towards non-British immigration to Western Canada, and on early Protestant proselytizing efforts among them. Vivian Olender’s research was particularly instrumental in reconstructing one such effort, the Presbyterian mission among Canadian Ukrainians in the first quarter of the 20th century. Unlike Galician Ukrainian immigration to Canada that due to its numbers and economical contribution to the development of the Canadian West has attracted considerable scholarly attention, Ukrainian Evangelical immigration from Russia is largely neglected. Recent research on early 20th century Evangelical religious refugees from Russia in the Prairies
This chapter will show how the place of origin in the old country and personal religious background played a role in the self-identification of the Benito community as a Russian-Ukrainian church of Evangelical Christians. Furthermore, the community’s long-standing role as a sectarian and discriminated against group shifted to a realization of a new role of a voluntary association in an individualistic and capitalist society where religion is a private matter. The initial stage in the history of the Benito church can be called, after Frank Epp’s definition of the Mennonites of the same time period, “a people’s struggle for survival.” Yet, the Benito church positioned itself as part of the larger world of the Canadian evangelical Christianity from early on, participating in such activities, typical of Anglo-Canadian evangelical churches of the time, as home mission, outreach ministry, and social ministry. Thus, the Benito community was one of those immigrant evangelical churches, which, as noted by Bruce Guenther, “represent an important strand within the larger Canadian evangelical Protestant tapestry.”

A detailed analysis of Slavic Evangelical Christians in relation to evangelicalism and a comparison between them and other religious settlers in western Canada will follow in Chapter VII. Nevertheless, elements of comparison will be used in the present chapter as necessary.

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conducted by Jonathan Kalmakoff, a Doukhobor activist, genealogist, and historian, proved to be of special value for this study. A history of Ukrainian Baptists in Canada by Rev. Petro Kindrat remains the most complete such study to date. Its merits, such as factual wealth, specificity, and first-hand knowledge of the subject are somewhat hindered by an overt nationalist and political bias. Kindrat strove to present the Evangelical movement among Ukrainians, both in the Ukraine and in Canada, as something completely independent from the analogous developments in Russia or among other Eastern Slavic immigrants in Canada, a view that cannot be justified by facts.


3 Bruce L. Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 370.
Early Slavic Immigration to Canada

Writings by James Woodsworth (1874-1942), a Canadian Methodist minister, social activist and politician, founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Foundation, a predecessor of the NDP, reflected the attitudes of the Canadian state to immigration in the first decades of the 20th century. Woodsworth’s *Strangers Within Our Gates* treated the problem of immigration that Canada was increasingly facing, and proposed how the state and the society should approach it. From the vantage point of today’s Canadian multiculturalism and tolerance, the epithets that Woodsworth used to describe many groups of immigrants sound truly appalling. However, Woodsworth always made sure to emphasize immigrants’ worthy qualities or the contribution they have made to Canadian society. Classification and description of Ukrainian and Russian immigrants that reflected prevailing views of the time is of particular interest for this study.

Woodsworth was absolutely right in saying that "most of our immigrants from Russia are not Russians. Many of them are Germans or Jews; others are Lithuanians and Poles." The Russian Doukhobors, whom Woodsworth praised for being hard working, industrious and clean people, despite their peculiar lifestyle and “weird” religion, were one notable exception. Ukrainians from the Russian Empire, or “Little Russians,” as he called them, apparently, were so scarce at that time in Canada compared to main immigrant groups, that Woodsworth did not even devote a section in his book to them.

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6 For instance, the Slovaks are described as essentially the same as the Czech (Bohemians), but “of a lower grade,” Armenians are deemed “incapable… of hard labour” and “parasites”, while Syrians are accused of a low intellectual level.
8 Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, 115, 123.
Most Ukrainians coming to Canada at that time, according to Woodsworth’s classification, were Galicians and Ruthenians, that is, Ukrainians from the then Austro-Hungary. The public opinion of those settlers at the dawn of the 20th century was rather unfavourable. Woodsworth mentioned that “the word Galician is almost a term of reproach,” especially due to violent crime among them and the general lack of culture. In spite of that, their “desirability” for Canada, according to Woodsworth, should be measured by the contribution they have made to the society. The latter was very valuable, for “much of the rough work of nation-building in Western Canada is done by a despised Galician.”

Especially notable in Woodsworth’s account of the Galicians and Ruthenians is his belief that the religious shift of those immigrants from the Uniate, or Ukrainian Catholic faith with its allegiance to the Roman Pope toward a more “evangelical” type of Christianity would be highly beneficial for their acculturation in Canada. Woodsworth specifically laid his hopes on an interesting religious development among Canadian Ukrainians in the early 20th century known as the Independent Greek church. In fact, the movement was an attempt to create a Ukrainian Protestant church strongly supported by Anglo-Canadian Presbyterians. The latter provided the Independent Greek church with some financial assistance and also offered theological and pastoral training for prospective Independent Greek ministers at Manitoba College. The Presbyterians saw

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their work among the Galicians as a means to ensure Anglo-Canadian domination in the
Canadian West and as the way to “civilize” the newcomers who did not meet the Anglo-
Canadian standard of civility of the time.14 That short-lived church emerged in 1903, but
largely ceased to exist by the early 1920s.15 Meanwhile, another Protestant body, the
Baptists, had a limited degree of success proselytizing among Galician Ukrainians in
Canada.16 At the same time, due to a sparse population, and an unusually high, even by
Canadian standards, percentage of immigrants, in the Prairies “the forces of English-
Canadian assimilation were relatively weak.”17

William Janzen in his study of the relationship between the Canadian state and
communalist religious settlers identified four main areas of tension. They are landholding,
public school system, religious pacifism, and acceptance by religious communalists of
the state assistance.18 At times the tension amounted in an open conflict, resulting in a
ban (1919) on the admission into Canada of Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors
because of the “peculiar habits, modes of life and methods of holding property” of the
three groups, or19 Sons’ of Freedom protests, which at times included nude parading, and
destruction of private and government property and vanished only by the early 1960s. It
would be safe to say that the Benito community (and Slavic Evangelical Christians in
general) had no record of conflict or tension in any if the mentioned areas. Nevertheless,

16 Joseph Edwin Harris, The Baptist Union of Western Canada. A Centennial History 1873-1973 (St John,
18 Janzen, Limits on Liberty, 1-4.
19 Janzen, Limits on Liberty, 15. In 1922 it was reversed in relation to the Mennonites and Hutterites, while
the restrictions against Doukhobors were lifted in 1926.
the comparative look at the respective patterns of behaviour of Slavic Evangelicals and other religious settlers will situate the Benito case better within the context.

**Benito: Local Background**

The village of Benito is a rural settlement located in the Municipality of Swan River, only 2 kilometres east of the Saskatchewan border, 37 kilometres southwest of Swan River, and about 475 kilometres northwest of the provincial capital, Winnipeg. The settlement was founded in 1905 and settled by pioneers from England and eastern Canada, and Russia. In 1941 the settlement was formally incorporated as the village of Benito. Currently the village has about 415 residents,\(^{20}\) about one-third of them of Slavic ancestry.

The most recent census records for the Rural Municipality of Swan River of which Benito is a part, showed that as of 2006 the Ukrainian ethnic group occupied the second place after the English among ethnic groups represented in the Municipality, while Ukrainian was as of that year the most wide-spread mother tongue other than English. The population born outside Canada, however, amounted only to 3% of the total, as compared to the Manitoba provincial average of 13%. Of all immigrants residing in the Municipality in 2006 43% immigrated before 1961, versus 16% in the province of Manitoba. These data mean that the Swan River area has long ceased to serve a preferred destination for immigrants (particularly, Ukrainians), which it was before the 1960s. The census records also indicated the overall gradual demographic decline of the area in the past forty or forty-five years. For instance, almost one half of all dwellings in the Municipality were built in the period before 1961 (versus around 33% of dwellings that

\(^{20}\) [http://community.svcn.mb.ca/benito/](http://community.svcn.mb.ca/benito/) (URL valid as of 15 January 2010)
old in the province), while almost 50% of the population as of 2006 belonged to the age group of 45 years and older, also much older than the Manitoba average.21

There are two functioning churches in the village, The Living Word Assembly and the Benito United church. Formerly the village had many more church communities and buildings, among them a Ukrainian Catholic church, a Roman Catholic church, a Doukhobor prayer home, and a Seventh-Day Adventist church.22 Another church that stood in the village from 1941 until 1996, the Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical Christian church, and the community that attended it is the topic of this research.

The first Slavic settlers in the Benito area were Russian Doukhobors who resettled in Saskatchewan and parts of present-day Manitoba following their immigration from Russia in 1898-99. The territory of the present village of Benito in 1899-1905 was within the so called North Reserve of the homestead land allotted by the government of Clifford Sifton for Russian Doukhobors.23 After most Community Doukhobors abandoned the area following the unresolved argument with the Canadian government over the issues of communal land holding, public school attendance, and disclosing vital statistics, the territory became open for other settlers. However, some Doukhobors, who split off the Petr Verigin’s community and agreed to comply with the law, remained in the area and retained their homesteads.24 One of the main present centres of Saskatchewan Doukhobors, the town of Kamsack, is located within a one hour drive from Benito on the Saskatchewan side of the provincial border. Although the migration of the people who

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22 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 16, 2006.
23 On the North Reserve of the period see Carl J. Tracie, Toil and Peaceful Life: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918 (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), 128-134.
24 Tracie, Toil and Peaceful Life, 176-77.
would later form a nucleus of the Benito congregation occurred much later, in late 1920s, 

there is a record of some Slavic Evangelical immigration and presence in the area dating 

back to the very beginning of the 1900s.

There were a few early sectarian non-Doukhobor Slavic groups in close proximity 

to Benito. One such group was so called Pavlovtsy, called so by the name of the village 
of Pavlovki near Kharkov, Ukraine, which was their stronghold.25 Pavlovtsy came into 

existence in 1870s and professed a mixture of the Stundist and Tolstoyan views. Their 

understanding of Christianity was characterised by non-ritualism, equality, freedom of 

religious expression, and pacifism. Notably, they were “at odds with the emergent Baptist 

Church, with its emphasis on dogma and organization.”26 Ethnically most of them were 

Ukrainians. They spoke a dialect of the Ukrainian language, especially close to Russian, 

but also were proficient in the standard literary Russian language. From 1899 to 1914 a 

group of about 40 followers of the Pavlovtsy movement immigrated to Canada from the 

Russian Empire. Many of them resettled in and near Kamsack among the somewhat like-

minded Doukhobors, who helped the Pavlovtsy to get established. Later some of the 

Pavlovtsy left the Kamsack area for other parts of Canada, the USA, or re-immigrated to 

the USSR. The remaining members of the small sectarian group joined the Independent 

Doukhobors of Kamsack. Interestingly, some of them modified their Ukrainian last 

names to sound more Doukhobor. For instance, Teterenko became Tetoff, Eremenko took 

the name of Eremenkoff, and Sereda became Sardoff.27 Intermarriage between the 

Doukhobors and the Pavlovtsy occurred from early on. It is remarkable that the first

25 Graham P. Camfield, “The Pavlovtsy of Khar'kov Province, 1886-1905: Harmless Sectarians or 


27 The story of the Pavlovtsy in Canada was researched and told by Jonathan Kalmakoff, the creator of the 

Doukhobor Genealogy Website. It is available online at http://www.doukhobor.org/Pavlovtsy.htm.
legally recognized marriage in Canada involving a Doukhobor was a wedding of a
Doukhobor Nikolai Antifaeff and a Pavlovtsy member Anna Ol’khovik, performed in
Swan River, Manitoba by a Methodist minister Rev. John E. Lane in April, 1906.28

Another group of early Evangelical settlers relatively close to Benito, in the
village of Hyas, Saskatchewan, were immigrants from near Kiev, Ukraine, who came to
the area around 1904 because of religious persecution back home. They belonged to the
Stundist sect known as Maliovantsy, and called themselves “Spiritual Christians” just as
the Doukhobors and Molokans. This branch of Stundism differed from the mainstream
Baptists by ecstatic worship and “spiritual,” or allegorical, interpretation of the Scriptures.
Both Doukhobors and Slavic Evangelical newcomers readily engaged in debates of a
religious nature with one another. Doukhobors helped them, and eventually at least one
of the members of that group also joined the Doukhobors (Pavel Skripnik who changed
his last name to Skripnikoff). Yet, a group of original Evangelical settlers remained in
Hyas, and, eventually, joined the activities of the Prokhanovite Union. As of June, 1933
two delegates from Hyas, brothers E. Belous and K. Kortenko participated in the “2nd
Spiritual and Edifying Conference” of Evangelical Christians that took place in Benito. 29

This paradigm of relationship characterises the Independent Doukhobors of
Saskatchewan and Manitoba as an open, rather tolerant milieu ready to help the like-
mined in spite of doctrinal and practical disagreements. Independent Doukhobors,
unlike many of their communal and Sons of Freedom brethren who moved to British
Columbia, generally complied with the governmental requirements regarding individual
homestead taking, compulsory school education, and disclosing vital statistics. This

28 Johnathan J. Kalmakoff, The Pavlovtsy, quoted from http://www.doukhobor.org/Pavlovtsy.htm,
29 Evangel’skaia vera, 11 (1933), 23.
resulted into a virtual absence of any significant conflict of the Independent Doukhobors with the authorities or the surrounding population, and a much faster and fuller integration into Canadian life.\(^{30}\)

The earliest Evangelical settlers in Western Canada had the following last names: Saveliev, Pavlov, Fedorov, Gavrilov, Muzyko, Lemberg, Mazurenko, Dunaenko, Egorov, Shcherbinin. \(^{31}\) Out of ten last names three (Muzyko, Mazurenko, Dunaenko) appear to be Ukrainian, six are Russian, and one, Lemberg, sounds German. This breakdown fairly accurately illustrates the ethnic composition of early Russian evangelicals in the old country and in Canada prior to the mass immigration of Ukrainian Evangelicals from the Volhynia in the 1920s.

At the same time a predominantly Ukrainian Baptist church was organized in Winnipeg in 1903 by about 25 religious refugees from the “Russian” Ukraine (especially Kiev Province) and the Caucasus. Since members of that church came from the Stundist and Caucasian Baptist background, the church in Winnipeg identified as a Baptist church from the beginning of its existence. Among its founding members who came to Winnipeg between 1900 and 1905 we encounter the following last names: Kapustyn’skyi, Muzhov, Koval’, Goncharenko, Kotenko, Belianivs’kyi, Gromeniuk, Lesyk, Movchenko, Servins’kyi, Lipovyi, Zabolotnyi, Nikiforov, Osadchyi, Shakot’ko, Kozachok, Marushchak, Bubys, Mizharovs’kyi, Grokh, Konotopenko, Tvardovs’kyi, Fesenko, Pavlov.\(^{32}\) As we can see, only 3 last names out of 25 (Muzhov, Nikiforov, and Pavlov)


appear to be Russian. Very soon the First Baptist Church of Winnipeg (English-speaking) learned about the new group of Baptists, and started providing them with moral and financial support. Over the next years the Ukrainian Baptist church in Winnipeg devoted significant effort to evangelizing among numerous Ukrainian newcomers in Manitoba.

Another Ukrainian Baptist centre in western Canada was the town of Overstone in Southern Manitoba where the Ukrainian Baptist group was organized thanks to the activities of local German Baptists and their preacher Johann Burgdorff in 1901.33 Galicians and Ruthenians, Ukrainians from what is now Western Ukraine and parts of Poland and Slovakia, continued to arrive in great numbers lured by free or cheap homesteads and other opportunities, mainly of an economic nature. Very few, if any of them were Protestant prior to arrival. Most Ukrainian immigrants from Austro-Hungary were Ukrainian Catholics (also known as Uniates, or Catholics of the Eastern Rite). Orthodox believers and Roman Catholics were a minority.34

As a result of the efforts of early Baptist settlers and the considerable aid of their Anglo-Canadian and German co-religionists, in 1909 Ukrainian Baptist groups formed a Union under the name Ruthenian-Galician Union of Western Canada (Rus’ko-Halyts’kyi Soiuz Zahidnoi Kanady).35 The name of the Union containing a reference to Ruthenians (living in what are now westernmost Transcarpathian Ukraine, Slovakia, and Poland) and Galicians, indicates a rapid shift in its membership from predominantly Central Ukrainian with some Russian component to mainly Western Ukrainian following the general pattern of the Ukrainian immigration into Canada.

33 Kindrat, The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada, 51-56. Harris, The Baptist Union of Western Canada, 185.
34 Myroslaw Tataryn, “Canada’s Eastern Christians,” in Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 292.
35 Kindrat, The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada, 46.
Western Ukraine, or Galicia, rejoined the rest of the Ukrainian lands only in 1939, when Galicia was annexed by the USSR. Ironically, Ukraine is indebted for its present national unity and territorial extension to none else than the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, who is cursed by Western Ukrainians for destroying their traditional way of life through the forced collectivization and the assault on religion. In spite of the political unity within the Ukrainian SSR till 1991 and then within the independent Ukraine, the distinction between Galicians and the rest of Ukrainians, rooted, according to some recent scholarship, mainly in the denominational difference, is persistent. 36

Volhynia, the Old Country

Individuals and families who were soon to become founders of the Benito church started coming into the area in late 1929. The first members were born and raised in the same historical region, Volhynia. This province and its people had a truly difficult history. The Volhynia’s people lost control over their own land in medieval times, following the disintegration of the Kievan Rus, and since then the province belonged to the Kingdom of Poland, the Great Duchy of Lithuania, the Russian Empire (from 1783), again to the resurrected Polish Republic (from 1918), and the USSR (from 1939). 37 Currently most of the region is part of the independent Ukrainian state. At the time of the emergence of the Evangelical movements in Russia all of Volhynia was part of the Russian Empire. The birth of the evangelical awakening in the province dates back to 1876 when a local dweller Semion Ovdeichuk converted due to the preaching of a believer of Czech origin.

In the following year Ivan Riaboshapka, a prominent leader of the Ukrainian Stundism, came to the area to encourage the new converts and plant a church. Due to a geographical proximity to the north-western urban centres of the Russian Empire, such as Saint-Petersburg, Riga, and Warsaw, the province soon came under the influence of the emerging Prokhanovite movement. From its first steps the Evangelical movement in Volhynia was characterised by a great ethnic diversity. The analysis of relevant archival documents pertaining to the formation and legalization of the Evangelical church in Kovel’ after the October Manifesto of 1905, shows that although Ukrainians comprised the majority of Evangelical believers in the province, a high proportion of the latter were of Polish, German, Russian, and Czech origin.38 These believers normally used the Russian language as the method of interethnic communication in their meetings.

In independent Poland in the interwar period, Volhynia was one of the strongholds of the Polish Evangelical church which belonged to the broader worldwide family of the Prokhanovite movement. Liudvig Shenderovskii provided statistical data on Evangelical Christians in Poland as of 1939. Out of 134 communities and large groups of the Evangelical Christians in the country 93, that is, about 70% were located in Volhynia.39 The town of Zdolbunov, the birthplace of many of the early Benito settlers, had an active Evangelical Christian church, with a youth group “The Young Vineyard,” which organized literary nights.40 In the 1930s the Slavic Evangelical church ran an orphanage in the Volhynian city of Kovel’. This charitable undertaking was generously

39 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 262-263.
40 Evangel’skaia vera, 8 (1933), 20.
supported by many Evangelical Christian groups and individual believers in North America.\textsuperscript{41}

Volhynia was a rural and economically backward part of Poland, populated mostly by the Ukrainian ethnic minority.\textsuperscript{42} Ukrainians in Poland, in spite of their significant numbers (14\% of population as of 1918), did not enjoy any sort of political or cultural autonomy. They were largely deprived of the opportunity to exert any political influence or develop education in the mother tongue. Inter-ethnic relations between Ukrainian and Polish communities in the interwar Poland were marked by a profound conflict. Later, during the Nazi occupation of the region, it burst open in the form of an ethnic cleansing of Poles in Volhynia known in Poland as the Volhynian Slaughter (Polish Rzeź wołyńska) by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army guerrillas (Ukr. Ukrain’ska Povstan’ska Armiia).\textsuperscript{43}

In addition to the ethnic discrimination in interwar Poland, the non-Polish population was subject to religious discrimination and prejudice. Although the Polish Constitution promised freedom of religion, it guaranteed the Roman Catholic church special rights and privileges. Registration of religious communities was subject to the discretion of the officials of the Ministry of Cults, who were especially reluctant to extend their benevolence to sectarian communities. The public sentiment towards sectarians in a staunchly Catholic Poland was often unfriendly or even hostile.\textsuperscript{44} Hence, Ukrainians of Evangelical faith were often subject to dual discrimination, both as an ethnic and religious minority.

\textsuperscript{41} Evangelskaia vera, 4-6 (1938), 19.
\textsuperscript{42} Magosci, A History of Ukraine, 587-88.
\textsuperscript{43} About the Volhynian Slaughter see, for example: Timothy Snyder, The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943. The Past and Present Society (Oxford University Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{44} Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 226-228.
Therefore, it is possible to point to three main overlapping reasons for emigration of Ukrainian Evangelical Christians from Poland. Firstly, they did not see much economic opportunity in their homeland due to the economic backwardness of Volhynia. Secondly, limited employment and economic opportunities were further aggravated by ethnic discrimination and the marginalised status of minorities in the political and social life of the interwar Poland. Lastly, for Ukrainian Evangelicals of Volhynia emigration to the New World was also a chance to get rid of religious discrimination, prejudice, and limitations. Canada, along with the USA and Argentina, was one of the most popular destinations for Polish Ukrainians, and a traditional destination country for Ukrainian immigrants for decades.

A few of the Benito pioneer families and individuals came from the town of Zdolbunov or surroundings, the town of Dubno and adjacent rural areas, about 40 kilometres from Zdolbunov, nowadays the Rovno (Ukr. Rivne) province in Western Ukraine. Other families, of Belorussian origin, came from near Monki, now a town in the Bialystok county of Poland, on the border with Belorussia.

The conversation below took place in the home of a senior couple of local Doukhobors in Benito. This was the first out of the series of interviews taken for this study. Both informants, Laura and Peter Verigin, were born around the time the first Evangelicals came into Benito and the surrounding area (the late 1920s) and are, therefore, living witnesses of the history of the Benito Evangelical Christians. Mrs. Verigin has been a Doukhobor community activist for many years, and received distinctions for her involvement with community affairs. She has had a fairly extensive experience speaking to the public. Although her husband Peter started answering
questions, Mrs. Verigin took a lead in the conversation. Both Mrs. and Mr. Verigin were about equally comfortable with using English and Russian during the conversation, and switched from one language to another constantly, sometimes within the same phrase. It was obvious that they enjoyed speaking Russian, but sometimes lacked appropriate vocabulary to convey more sophisticated ideas. In relation to the Benito church the Verigins assumed a position of external, albeit sympathetic, observers and narrators. Using Alessandro Portelli’s classification of narrative modes, this interview (interrupted by a lunch), corresponds to the collective mode, with the community and the neighbourhood as social and space referents.45

Peter Verigin: The area was originally populated with the people of British origin. That would be English, Scottish, and Irish. Because they were the first people that came here.

Interviewer: The first white people.

Laura Verigin: That’s right. Because there were native people, a lot, in this area.

P.V.: Consequently that meant that they had a further influence because they were the ones who had homesteaded the land; they’d taken the area and started the agriculture in the area.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you about those Evangelical people. Were they also given homesteads?

L.V.: They could’ve purchased, but already there was nothing to purchase. The land was taken.

Interviewer: So what did they do?

L.V.: They just came… like somebody had sponsored them. And they’d lived as squatters. If there was a little hut or… like, some of them… even a chicken house, they just converted it into a place to live. And they were resourceful. Very, very resourceful. Right away they get a job, no matter what you do, they can do it.

Interviewer: Handymen, journeymen?

L.V.: They chopped wood, they sold it, whatever was available, they were able to do it and bring home a little bit of cash. And, of course, the women were very thrifty, they knew what it was to sow, to knit, to grow a garden, to look after families.

Interviewer: But very few of them had their own acreage…

P.V.: Eventually, yes. …Some of this farming land was vacated by the people of British origin because of the economic depression. They went elsewhere looking for economic opportunities.46

It is clear that Mr. and Mrs. Verigin immediately and tacitly negotiated the roles, where an question pertaining to farming was answered by Mr. Verigin, while Mrs. Verigin felt more comfortable explaining the role of women in helping Slavic Evangelical families survive.

Int.: So, ethnically they were not so much Russian as Ukrainian.

L.V.: Malorusy [Little Russians, an outdated term for Ukrainians], they were something like… you know…

46 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Laura and Peter Verigin, Benito, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
P.V.: [interrupts] Belorussians.

L.V.: Well, Belorussians… The language wasn’t too hard to grasp, but we were young at that time. We were still young people… The minister that put that church up that was just demolished here about four years ago, his daughter and I, we were in the same grade.

P.V.: They came about [19]28-29, the end of the 20s.

L.V.: Right into the Great Depression.47

Both informants struggled with identifying newcomers as an ethnic group. It felt like the question took the Verigins by surprise, and that they have never thought of them as representatives of a specific ethnic group. Informants’ inability to define newcomers in terms of ethnicity likely reflected the fact that the newcomers did not define themselves in those terms. As we shall see further, Slavic Evangelical Christians were frequently hesitant to define their ethnicity as Ukrainian, Russian, or Belorussian. Rather, the umbrella term “Slavic” all too often was used as an ethnic (in fact, ethno-religious) designation.

The Verigins were surprisingly precise in identifying the years of the arrival of first Evangelical Christians to Benito. The most feasible explanation of this is that the in their perception (and, likely, in the collective perception of the village) the arrival of the newcomers was linked to the memorable years of the Great Depression. In the words of Portelli, the Depression served as a powerful “place of memory,”48 thus rescuing the chronology from oblivion. It turned out that the Verigins were aware of the historical

47 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Laura and Peter Verigin, Benito, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
book about the community, *The Church in the Valley*, which contained the same arrival
dates of 1928-29. However, it is unlikely that they took the date from the book, since the
book contained numerous references to the newcomers as Ukrainians and even sections
in the Ukrainian language.

The Benito immigrants, strictly speaking, were not sponsored by anyone. Although the
country had sunk into a deep depression by then, Canada still continued to accept
immigrants in the late 1920s. In contrast with the migration flows of the late 19\(^{th}\)
and pre-war years of the 20\(^{th}\) century, after the World War I “Canadian authorities
showed little interest in resuming the flow.”\(^{49}\) In fact, the immigration of such religious
groups as Mennonites, Hutterites was barred until 1922, while Doukhobor immigrants
remained inadmissible until 1926. Nevertheless, Canada still accepted those immigrants
who were “bona fide agriculturalists, labourers, and domestics, all of whom were
classified according to a system of preferred and nonpreferred countries.”\(^{50}\) There was an
immigration bureau in the city of Rovno, the administrative capital of Volhynia, where
those seeking to depart for North America usually began their journey.

Russian Mennonite migrants of the 1920s displayed much the same patterns of
employment. Farming undoubtedly was the first preference for these skilled
agriculturalists. However, as noted by Frank Epp, “working for hourly wages was a
necessity for hundreds of the first immigrants, …whose settlement on their own land was
held up for nearly a year.”\(^{51}\) At that, if Russian Mennonites could often count upon their
more established co-religionists, migrants of the 1870s, Slavic Evangelical Christians
often had to rely only upon themselves.

The first family of Evangelical Christians that settled near Benito (in Thunderhill, a few miles away) and later became members of the church was Steve (Stepan) Roda, his wife and daughter. They settled in Thunderhill in 1928. The first families from Volhynia who settled in Benito were Sebastian Leskewich and Brothers Stephen (Stepan) and Paul (Pavlo) Bielik. They met in the Rovno immigration office, and decided to travel together. Both Leskewich and brothers Bielik were Evangelical believers already in the old country. They arrived in Winnipeg in late May of 1929 and were met by Evangelical Christian activists of Belorussian origin who had come to Canada much earlier, Ivan (John) Guk (also spelled Huk) and Ignatii (Ignace) Sidorchuk. Both Guk and Sidorchuk were at the time leaders of the emerging community of Evangelical Christians in Canada. They directed the newcomers to the Alpine (a few miles from Benito) district with the hope that they would find employment or buy land easier than in more urbanized or populated areas. In July 1929 another small group of Evangelical Christians from Volhynia came to the area: David Naydiuk and family, Luke Naydiuk and family, and Andrew Blocha and family. Naturally, those believers, in spite of their adverse economic conditions, and the confusion of the initial months in a new country, sought contacts with the like-minded. The first informal Evangelical worship meeting in the Benito district took place in September 1929 when another Evangelical believer from Hyas, Saskatchewan, Iakiv Prychidko visited the newcomer Paul Bielik whom he had known in the old country. Together they travelled to the Naydiuk farm by horse, and had the first joint Evangelical meeting. Of course, at that point there was no established leadership in the church. It emerged a month later, when a prominent Ukrainian Baptist preacher and

52 Church in the Valley, Lydia McKinnon, compiler (Winnipeg: 1985), 19.
53 Church in the Valley, 13.
leader in Western Canada, Petro Kindrat, assumed temporary pastoral care over the newborn church. October 19th, 1929 is considered the birth date of the Benito church.54 Yet, since Stepan Roda, who converted in Poland, and eventually became pastor of the Benito church, arrived to the district in 1928, this year was chosen as a starting point in the development of the church, and was reflected in the title of this thesis. Kindrat appointed Luke Naydiuk as an acting pastor of the small group. Very soon pastoral office became a shared ministry among capable brothers. Luke (Luka) Naydiuk, Stephen (Stepan) Roda, Bernatsky, Andrew (Andrii) Petelski, Paul (Pavlo) Kudryk, Paul (Pavlo) Bielik, Leskewich, and others preached in turns and shared pastoral responsibilities.

The following interview took place in the house of Anna and Mike Gnida, lifelong members of the church. Mr. Gnida, an elderly gentleman in his 70-ies, was the last deacon of the church prior to its dissolution. A farmer by occupation, he nevertheless had an extensive experience addressing public, which was a part of his church duties. Mr. Gnida led the conversation. He spoke English (for the most part) and a peculiar mixture of Ukrainian and Russian, which the interviewer, sufficiently familiar with both languages, cannot unequivocally define as either one of them. Mrs. Gnida spoke only in English, although she understood what was being said in Ukrainian and Russian. The Gnidas recalled the early period of the existence of the community in the following words:

Anna Gnida: My parents came because my uncle was already in Canada. And they lived with him until they got established… There was land available if you had money.

54 Petro Kindrat, The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada, 72.
Interviewer: I’ve heard that when they came they had to do whatever, like menial jobs, chopping wood…

Mike Gnida: Yea, that’s true…My dad bought land quite quick, because his mother said: “When you come to Canada, buy land right away!” And so my father did. But that wasn’t a good decision, because that was in [19]29, and in [19]31-32… depression. So what he bought, animals, cows, he sold it for less money than he bought it. It wasn’t a good time, but they survived. My dad worked hard.55

Again, as in the case of the Verigins, the theme of the Great Depression as an important landmark of the collective memory is apparent. The arrival time seemed to have been permanently tied up to the time of the beginning of the economic downturn, which was perceived as the main challenge newcomers had to face even by the second-generation narrators. The interviewer did not ask the informants about how their families acquired land. The topic of land came about somewhat inadvertently, and both informants chose to address it. This is not surprising, given the farming background of the family. But at the same time this suggests the significance land and owning land had for these newcomers. Mr. Gnida, of course, could not have heard his grandmother (who never made it to Canada) advising his father to buy land immediately. This was, so to speak, a family legend. But no matter whether she really said that or not, the account stands true, for “the perception of an account as ‘true’ is relevant as much to legend as to personal experience and historical memory,”56 and attests to the importance of land as a motivation, a goal, and a symbol of the migration.

55 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
Mike Gnida was born in Minitonas, Manitoba, a village in the vicinity of Benito. His parents came to Canada from near Zdolbunov in Volhynia. In 1931 some Trofimchuk from Minitonas wrote a short letter to *Evangel’skaia vera*. The letter read: “We are about 40 believers here. We are all immigrants from Poland, from different places and communities, but here we are all one community. Unemployment hit us hard; please pray for us so that we could stay awake.”57 We do not find the last name Trofimchuk in the later history of the Benito church. He could have left the area seeking better work opportunities, which was not uncommon for Slavic immigrants to the area. Another Evangelical believer, Nadezhda Balagurova-Protsiuk, born in 1909 in Zolotiev, near Rovno, Volhynia, immigrated to Canada with her husband in 1930, and initially settled in Cando, Saskatchewan. The young couple intended to farm, but already in 1931 they moved to Ontario “seeking work,” and were hired to pick strawberries. Then they lived in the city of Waterford, Ontario in the wintertime, and moved to nearby farms for seasonal work in the summer.58 Engaging in agricultural enterprise at that time would have been a rather imprudent decision. According to Gerald Friesen, “no major Canadian industry suffered as much as agriculture in the economic downswing, and none recovered so slowly.” At that, 1931 was the year of famous dust storms in the Prairies.59

The memorial photo of the founding members of the Benito church taken on October 20th, 1929, pictures twenty people, at least eight of them children in front of the shabby storage shed or a stable.60 Apparently, the first services were held on the farm rented or owned by Mr. Lipka, one of the founding members of the community. None of

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58 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 9 (1933), 16.
60 *Church in the Valley*, 12.
the original member families had cars at the time the church was founded. They had to use horses or walk great distances in order to get to the meeting.

Another small group of Evangelical believers from Volhynia settled in the nearby Thunderhill district by 1930. At first, due to lack of reliable means of transportation and good roads, they met separately for Sunday worship. On special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter, they held joint meetings in the Benito Doukhobor meetinghouse. Petro Kindrat continued to take care of the Benito community for a few initial years while new families and individuals from Volhynia were coming to the area.

Thus, up to the time the group decided to build its own prayer home in the village of Benito (1941), we have two clusters of Slavic Evangelical believers in two neighbouring districts, Alpine and Thunderhill. They tried to co-ordinate their efforts; gather jointly as often as they could, yet, they were somewhat separated by the distances and, especially, poor roads and lack of transportation. Nevertheless, members of both local groups felt they belonged to one church community, and worked towards the goal of further integration. The Sunday services were “held in homes alternately at that time,” while for Christmas and Easter services Evangelicals gathered in the Benito Doukhobor prayer home.61

The group maintained records of its life and kept detailed records of business meetings, baptisms, weddings, and visits of believers from other localities. Most of them are lost, but some are still kept by former members, including Mike Gnida, who was deacon at the final stage of the existence of the community. The sample below (see Illustration 2) is one of these historical records in the possession of Mr. Gnida. Such records during the initial stage in the life of the Benito church were written down in what

61 The Church in the Valley, 19.
appears to be Russian with numerous Ukrainian words, apparently used when the record keeper did not know the appropriate bookish Russian word or expression. At the same time all or almost all families that formed the nucleus of the Benito church were Ukrainians and nationals of Poland, and always used their local dialect of Ukrainian for family and group communication. The deliberate use of Russian for the purposes of record-keeping is easy to understand considering the fact that Volhynia had been part of the Russian Empire for at least 120 years prior to its inclusion into the Polish state which took place in 1918, that is, only 11 years before the arrival of the first Benito Evangelicals. Thus, adult newcomers, mainly couples with children at the time of arrival, probably received their school instruction in Russian when Volhynia was still part of Russia. In addition to this, Ukrainian immigrants from Volhynia apparently felt closer cultural, historical and linguistic affinity with Russia than with Poland. That is why using Polish was not an option even though they must have had a command of the Polish language as well. The linguistic situation of Ukrainian Evangelicals in Benito closely resembles that of “russophile” Ruthenians in Austro-Hungarian Galicia who used in their literature a language based upon literary Russian, Old Church Slavonic and the local Galician dialect.62

Although historically Evangelical Christians in Volhynia belonged to Prokhanov’s Union and then to its subsidiary, the Polish church of Evangelical Christians, at first the Benito group remained unaffiliated. Pastoral care of Petro Kindrat, among other things, pursued a goal of incorporating the Benito group into the Ukrainian Baptist Union of Western Canada. Ukrainian Baptist groups in Manitoba and elsewhere in

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Western Canada consisted mainly of immigrants from Galicia who were mostly recent converts from the Ukrainian Catholic (less frequently Orthodox) church.

The first reference to Benito in *Evangel’skaia vera* occurred in 1931. In September of that year a Canadian Conference of Evangelical Christians took place in Toronto. One of the delegates, Polina Kovalevskaja, a prominent Evangelical Christian activist and women’s leader, an immigrant from Volhynia, shared a report on her trip to western Canada. Kovalevskaja had spent some time in Manitoba, among Slavic believers, and mentioned that those of Benito especially sought to keep the purity of the teaching of Christ, and “desire to have communion with all true believers.” At the same Conference Kovalevskaja was elected the head of the women’s movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada. Simultaneously, Benito Evangelical Christians made their step toward the goal of communion with fellow-believers. Luka Naidiuk, the one of the acting leaders of the newborn community, addressed the Canadian Conference in Toronto with a letter, which was read publicly along with epistles from Prokhanov, the US Slavic Evangelical leader Shevchuk, and others.

According to Petro Kindrat, in 1934, when the community became stronger and numbered a few dozen people (with children), church members decided formally to join the Canadian branch of the Prokhanovite Union. Kindrat and the leadership of the Ukrainian Union lamented this decision. Kindrat wrote in his book with poorly concealed irritation that he had founded and ministered to the Benito congregation until in 1934 it decided to join the “Russian” Union of Evangelical Christians. This interpretation of the history is not consistent with other evidence in our possession. We know from the

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63 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 4 (1932), 11.
64 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 4 (1932), 12.
65 Kindrat, *Ukrainian Baptist Movement*, 73.
memoirs of the pioneers of the Benito congregation that the first Evangelical settlers were met in Winnipeg by Evangelical activists Guk and Sidorchuk. They suggested the newcomers might proceed to the area in order to let them find employment and purchase land more easily. They urged the newcomers to keep together. So Evangelical activists already did what they could to prevent dispersion of Slavic Evangelical immigrants in Canada. However the Slavic Evangelical Union in Canada came into existence only in September of 1930, that is, after Kindrat had discovered a cluster of Evangelical settlers and started supervising them.

Another misrepresentation of the history by Petro Kindrat is that he referred to the Evangelical Union as a “Russian” church. The worldwide brotherhood of Slavic Evangelicals, as we demonstrated in the previous chapter, was a truly multi-ethnic organization, which included great many Ukrainians, Belorussians, Poles, Bulgarians, Russian-born Germans, and representatives of smaller ethnic groups. In Canada in particular Ukrainians had always been a majority among Evangelical Christians.

There is a good evidence to support this argument from the ethnicity of the leadership of Canadian Evangelical Christians from its foundation in 1930 until 1980. The chairmen of the Canadian Union were in chronological order: Ivan Sidorchuk (Belorussian), Ivan Prokhanov (Russian), Tarasiuk (Ukrainian), Romaniuk (Ukrainian), Guk (Belorussian), Vetrov (Russian), Koliba (Ukrainian). Secretaries of the Union were (in chronological order) Shimuda, Shvets, Bernadsky, Vozniuk, Prityko. Judging by their last names, they all were either Ukrainian or Belorussian. Communities of Evangelical Christians in Canada were free to use in their worship a language that suited their audience. The Songbook commonly used by Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada was

66 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 329.
trilingual, and contained hymns and songs in English, Russian, and Ukrainian.\footnote{Christian Songs. Khristianskie Pesni. Khristians’ki Pisni, compiled by John K. Huk and Gene Dulin (Weston, Ontario: Toronto Christian Mission).} The Foreword to the edition stated: “Christian Songs is unique in that three languages are used. Evangelical Christian churches in English-speaking countries have some regular attendants who speak only Russian, or Ukrainian, or English.”\footnote{Christian Songs, Foreword, i-iii.} Liudvig Shenderovskii (a Pole by origin) emphasized that “Slavic Evangelical Christians always loved and respected all ethnic groups. That is why nationalism among Evangelical Christians in Canada was not encouraged, and elevation of one ethnicity over another was not tolerated.”\footnote{Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 329.} As we can see, the working model of the brotherhood of Evangelical Christians was essentially multicultural, in some aspects anticipating the Canadian policy of multiculturalism implemented from early 1970s onwards. So what did Kindrat mean when he called the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada, an organization with mainly Ukrainian membership and leadership, a “Russian church”? He did not like the fact that the Union of Slavic Evangelicals was not, unlike Kindrat’s Baptist Union of Western Canada, a Ukrainian national organization. Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada did not support the goals and ideology of Ukrainian nationalism, and frankly recognized the historical bond between East Slavic peoples in general, and a shared history of Slavic Protestantism in particular.

The year 1934, when, according to Kindrat, the Benito community joined the Evangelical Christian Union, does not seem accurate, either. In early 1932 Evangel’skaia vera informed its readers that the All-Canadian Conference of Evangelical Christians would take place in Benito on June, 16-19, 1932. It looks highly improbable that the
Slavic Evangelical brotherhood decided to let the Benito community host its national conference without that church being part of the wider Fellowship. In January, 1932 Ignatii Sidorchuk, the Evangelical leader from Toronto, went on a pastoral trip to Manitoba. Benito was the first church he visited. Sidorchuk colourfully described frost and snowy storm “which hardly can happen in Toronto” that he had to endure before he got to the Durban train station in the vicinity of Benito. A postman finally took him to Luka Naidiuk’s, since Sidorchuk was quite disoriented and could not find his destination on his own. Sidorchuk reported: “Believers here live fairly far away from each other, that is why it is difficult for them to attend meetings regularly… During my five-day stay there, the Lord permitted us to have meetings in various locations… In spite of the extreme poverty of many brothers and sisters, great distances, frost, and snowy storms, they gladly made 20 miles to get to a meeting. The God’s word had a special power.”

The Benito members and Sidorchuk agreed to maintain close contacts, and the guest proceeded to Saskatoon.

What are some of the reasons Evangelical Christians of Benito preferred to join the numerically weaker Union of Evangelical Christians rather than the national Ukrainian Baptist Union which was very active in Manitoba? Firstly, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Evangelical Christians and Baptists, in spite of theological similarities, were two different denominations. Benito Evangelicals were not \textit{tabula rasa} in terms of their religious views unlike most Galician converts to Baptism. Most of them had been members of the Evangelical church in the home country. Therefore, they naturally wanted to rejoin the church they felt themselves a part as soon

\footnote{Evangel’skaia vera, 10-11 (1932), 14.}
\footnote{Evangel’skaia vera, 10-11 (1932), 14.}
as it became possible. Secondly, by being part of the Slavic Evangelical family, they recognized their spiritual, cultural, and linguistic unity with the Russian people. Galician Baptist Ukrainians, most of whom were immigrants from Austro-Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia and former Ukrainian Catholics, often did not have that sense of shared history or a feeling of closeness.

**Doukhobors and Evangelical Christians**

As it was noted, Evangelical Christians from Volhynia came to an area already settled by a linguistically and culturally akin sect of the Doukhobors. By 1929 the branch of Independent Doukhobors completely split off from the communal Doukhobors, now led by Petr Chistiakov (Verigin), son of the late leader Peter (Petr) Vasilievich Verigin. Chistiakov was a person of bad temper and dubious moral qualities, so Independent Doukhobors of Saskatchewan, who still had a degree of respect (rather than obedience) for his father, did not consider Chistiakov their leader. According to Woodcock and Avakumovic, “[In 1930s] the Independents… were establishing more complex contacts with the world around them.”72 At the time of the arrival of Evangelical Christians to Benito, Doukhobors had at least three permanent community buildings in the area: in Kamsack, Saskatchewan, Pelly, Saskatchewan, and Benito, Manitoba. The Evangelical Christians made use of the Benito Doukhobor prayer home from at least as early as 1932. The mentioned Conference of Evangelical Christians in June, 1932 in Benito took place “in the building of Doukhobors.”73 Doukhobors did not just provide the building. The

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report published in *Evangel'skoe slovo* after the Conference informed that around 300 Doukhobors attended the Benito Conference.\(^7^4\)

In 1933 Evangelical residents of two farming communities adjacent to the village of Benito, Thunderhill and Alpine, held joint Easter and Christmas worship meetings in the Benito Doukhobor prayer home. Sadie (Mosienko) Naydiuk, a former member of the Benito community, a teenager at that time, recalled this experience in the following words: “I remember the first Christmas concert that I attended. It was a real highlight for all of us and especially the children. It was held in Benito in the Doukhobor Hall. To bring the children ten to twelve miles on a cold winter’s night was not an easy task; so men borrowed the large Alpine school van, hitched their horses to it, and brought a load down to Benito for a concert… Many outsiders came to the concert… There was a Christmas tree for the children with real candles for lights, and candy bags too!”\(^7^5\) This practice continued for at least eight years till 1941 when the Evangelical Christians finally erected their own prayer building in Benito. The project took a few years, for the Evangelical community decided to launch the construction in 1939. The level of accommodation of the Doukhobors to their Evangelical neighbours is amazing. Doukhobors not only gave permission to use their premises for strictly religious purposes, but also did not mind the activities that were generally not consistent with the viewpoint of the Doukhobors anti-ritualistic traditions such as concerts and a Christmas tree.

From 5\(^{th}\) to 8\(^{th}\) of July, 1934 a “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” of Evangelical Christians in Canada was held in Benito. The host community was characterized as “a community members of which are scattered on farms within a few miles from each

\(^{7^4}\) *Evangel’skaia vera*, 12 (1932), 24.
\(^{7^5}\) *The Church in the Valley*, 17.
This type of conferences was regularly held in different churches belonging to the Union of Evangelical Christians for the purposes of spiritual encouragement and instruction. Usually they were chaired by leadership of the Union. Guests from other Union churches also took part in the Conferences. The Benito Conference of 1934 was led by Ivan Prokhanov who at that time was residing temporarily in Toronto, Canada. It was held in the Benito Doukhobor prayer home. The Benito prayer home was closed down in the 1950s, but the photo below (see Illustration 3) taken in the functioning Kamsack prayer home gives the reader the idea of the interior of a Doukhobor prayer hall. The Conference of 1934 in Benito revolved around the idea of a “broadest mission” among the Slavs. Apparently, by that the Evangelical Christian church in Canada had become strong enough, and could expand its outreach after the initial task of uniting scattered communities had been completed. “It turned out that there are around half a million Russians, Ukrainians, and other Slavs in Canada. The number of believers compared to this is insignificant. That is why it was admitted that the greatest task of Evangelical Christians in Canada is the broadest Gospel mission.” The vision of a conversion of Slavic peoples as a starting point of the new worldwide reformation was still at the forefront. Interestingly, Doukhobors “of all three branches,” that is, Community Doukhobors, Independents, and Sons of Freedom, attended the Conference.

Mike Gnida, told the author about the relationship between their community and the Doukhobors:

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76 Evangel’skaia vera, 8-9 (1934), 23.
77 Evangel’skaia vera, 8-9 (1934), 22.
78 Evangel’skaia vera, 12 (1932), 23.
Mike Gnida: They had been here [before the Evangelicals came]. They used to come to us and sing. [He sings:] “We will all enter the house of the Father, and, may be, soon…” We sang the same psalms.

Interviewer: Did you have many Doukhobor converts in your church?
M.G.: Yes, we had Aleksei Malahoff and family. Then we had Fred (or Fiodor) Postnikoff, a Doukhobor. Mrs. Strukoff, that’s Malahoff’s sister. But it was mostly, like you said, mostly Ukrainians.

Interviewer: Were there any converts from among Evangelicals to the Doukhobor faith?
M.G.: No, I don’t think so. They sort of believe like we do, but there are some differences that I can’t really tell you about them, but… I know they sing the same psalms, but when we went to their funerals, they are a little bit different…

That Doukhobors readily sang Slavic Evangelical hymns is certain. Remarkably, singing the same songs in perception of Mr. Gnida constituted a similarity of belief. Apparently, there was a lot of interaction between the two groups on a purely human level. Attending each other’s funerals is, without doubt, a marker of close and respectful relationship between the two immigrant communities. Members of the both groups were well aware of the differences, but considered them relatively minor as compared to religious, cultural and language similarities. The informant suggested that Doukhobors beliefs closely resembled those of Evangelical Christians. In reality this is not so. The Doukhobor faith is not based upon the Bible, rituals of baptism and Lord’s supper are

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79 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
80 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 8-9 (1932), 13.
absent from the Doukhobor practice, and historically Doukhoborism evolved along the lines very distant from Protestantism. Yet, informant’s words suggest a perception of closeness members of the groups entertained towards each other. Transfer from one group to another and intermarriage was smooth. Besides, they were neighbours and shared the same difficulties and challenges of a life in a remote rural area with harsh climate, underdeveloped infrastructure, and under adverse overall economic conditions, which, undoubtedly, created a sense of solidarity. Mike Gnida’s personal archive contains a few photos attesting to the contacts between the two groups of Slavic religious dissenters in Canada (see Illustration 4). This black and white photo was taken in 1960s on the occasion of a visit to Benito of the Grand Forks Doukhobor choir from British Columbia. Grand Forks, a small town in the Kootenays, is a de facto capital of the British Columbia Doukhobors and a seat of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ81 offices. The photo shows a group of women and men, the former in traditional Doukhobor dress and with head coverings, in front of the Benito church of Evangelical Christians.

Another periodic Evangelical event that was held every summer in the Doukhobor prayer home in Benito was the Bible Conference. It was often attended by local Doukhobors in spite of the fact that the traditional Doukhobor faith rejected dependence upon the text of the Bible.82 Moreover, Doukhobor Morozov addressed the delegates expressing his thankfulness for another an opportunity to be at the Evangelical Christian

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81 USCC is the organization of the “Orthodox,” or Community Doukhobors, traditionally led by leaders from the Verigin lineage. They are the mainstream and most numerous Doukhobor group in Canada. See their official website at [http://www.usccdoukhobors.org](http://www.usccdoukhobors.org) (Link valid as of 4th of June, 2010)
82 The Church in the Valley, 23.
Conference in Benito and listen to the word of God!83 In the early or mid-1930s Slavic Evangelicals approached the then leader of Doukhobors Petr Petrovich Verigin (Chistiakov) with an offer to buy the Benito Doukhobor prayer hall. Chistiakov asked them how much they would be willing to pay for the hall. The Evangelicals could offer only 50 dollars, and Chistiakov, who was at that time in dire straits economically, fighting “a losing battle against depression”84 lost any interest in the deal, permitting them, however, to use the hall when they had a need.85 This anecdotal evidence, whether factually true or not, nevertheless reflected the sense of inter-communal solidarity which existed between Evangelical Christians and Doukhobors.

**Growth and Expansion**

From early on Slavic Evangelical Christians of Benito established contacts with English-speaking Protestants. One of the sessions of the “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” that took place in Benito in June, 1933 was bilingual. The reports said that since there were “English visitors” (posetiteli iz anglichan), the entire session was translated from one language to another.86 Ivan Guk helped with translation. Guk, born in Pinsk (now Belorussia), immigrated to Canada in 1928. In spite of his relatively short stay in North America by 1933, his ability to translate from and into English is easy to explain. In 1931 Guk went to Chicago and studied the Bible and music at the famous Moody Bible Institute for two years.87 The very fact of having English speaking guests at

83 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 11 (1933), 24.
84 Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 297.
85 Sergey Petrov. Conversation with N., a member of the Kamsack Doukhobor Society, Kamsack, Saskatchewan, October 11, 2009.
86 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 11 (1933), 23.
87 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 10-12 (1938), 18.
a Conference in Benito church, as well as the involvement of Ivan Guk with the well-known North American Bible school suggest an early identification of the Benito church and the Canadian Slavic Evangelicals in general with Canadian and North American evangelicalism.

A close look at other instances of early contacts between Canadian evangelical mainstream and Slavic Evangelicals confirm this suggestion. Oswald Smith, a well-known Canadian preacher, evangelist, and the founder of the non-denominational Toronto People’s Church was a guest speaker at a “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” held in Toronto in December, 1934. While Smith offered a “brief sermon” at the Conference, G. Janzen, a Mennonite presbyter from Kitchener, participated with his “deeply edifying and awakening” speeches.88

As the church grew, new forms of ministry emerged. A choir of the Benito congregation had a number of dedicated participants. Singing and musical culture in general has always been a very important part of the Ukrainian family and communal life. It is not surprising that Christian hymn singing became one of the earliest types of ministry that emerged in the young congregation. Later (in 1950s) the choir would even develop into a training center for church musicians, but it attained a fairly good level of performance much earlier. Quite often the choir successfully toured other churches in Western Canada. The choir (and the congregation) sang in Ukrainian and Russian. The choir gathered for practice every Saturday night at the homes of believers chosen to host a Sunday service the following day. Usually choir members stayed there overnight to spare a trip home.

88 *Evangel’skaia vera*, 2 (1934), 12.
Periodicals published by Evangelical Christians were important channels of news and inspiration, binding together communities and families that were separated physically. A reader from Minitonas near Benito shared the joy and inspiration he got from Evangel’skaia vera. He confessed that he was spiritually sleeping, and the magazine woke him up. Regular updates on persecutions of believers in the USSR especially prompted his awakening. “News about suffering Lord’s children in Russia made me think about them, pray for them, and sympathize with them.” The reader sent in a payment and asked to mail him at least two extra copies of Evangel’skaia vera for the sick believers to help them keep spiritually awake.89

Another type of ministry that emerged in the Benito church quite early was a youth group and a children’s group. Young people, most of them not yet members, comprised a significant part of participants at worship services and the church took care of their spiritual education till the time they got baptized to become full-fledged members. One of the former members described the children’s group activities in the following words: “In the summer times I remember Polly D’iachenko [née Kovalevskaia] used to visit… the homes and played games with us. We thought she was just great. Then she would take us in the house, tell us Bible stories and sing with us. After that the hostess gave us all lunch.”90 Pelageia (also known as Polly) D’iachenko-Kovalevskaia) was a well-known Evangelical worker among women and children in Poland, who came to Canada from Volhynia in 1930. Apart from missionary work, Polly, a nurse by profession, provided necessary medical assistance such as delivering babies for those Slavic Evangelicals who lived in rural areas where doctors and hospitals were not readily

89 Evangel’skaia vera, 4 (1933), 26.
90 The Church in the Valley, 21.
A more organized form of work among the young was formal Sunday school, apparently instituted after the church had been built in 1941.

After Prokhanov’s death in 1935 the level of involvement of the community in Benito did not suffer noticeable changes. In 1936 Benito hosted yet another “Spiritual and Edifying Conference,” and Evangel’skaia vera published a photo of a baptism that took place during that gathering. Polly D’iachenko-Kovalevskaia penned a report about her three month stay at Benito in 1936. According to the report, the church attendance in Benito reached 100 people (apparently, without small children). Kovalevskaia trained the Benito choir, which she was very pleased with. The women’s circle sold their handicraft at the Conference, and the community bought New Testaments for children from poor families attending the community Sunday school. All Evangelical Christian communities in western Canada at that time had Sunday schools for children, women’s and youth groups.

In July, 1938 the 8th “Spiritual, Edifying, and Business Conference” of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada took place in Benito. Luke Naidiuk was the spokesman on behalf of the host community, while Ignatii Sidorchuk chaired the Conference, P. Petelski represented youth groups, and Polly Kovalevskaia – women’s circles. All communities in Canada “with rare exceptions” had trained choirs and women’s circles as of 1938. Women, along with spiritual work, were expected to earn money for the evangelical projects through selling handicraft. The earned monies were spent on mission,

91 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 326.
92 Evangel’skaia vera, 10-12 (1937), 20.
93 Evangel’skaia vera, 1-3 (1938), 10.
the church-run orphanage in Kovel’ in Poland, construction of prayer houses, and to help poor families in the community.  

Slavic Evangelical women shared the responsibilities of providing for their families with their husbands. They were thrifty, usually experienced in a number of skills, such as sowing, knitting, and gardening, and very inventive. Along with that, women soon formed a ladies’ group within the church to participate in the spiritual labour. The first ladies’ meeting took place in January, 1937. Sadie Naydiuk, the first ladies’ leader, recalled it in the following words: “I was young in the faith and craved Christian fellowship, so I attended the meeting to see what these dear sisters in the Lord were planning to do… But it shocked me to tears when they voted me in, to lead the group. I tried to explain I didn’t know how to do it, …but each dear women promised to help and pray – and pray and help they did.” The church and its life were deeply rooted in the family and family values. Usually the entire family unit was a part of the community, and children received substantial Christian instruction in their families.

New settlers continued to arrive throughout the 1930s till the World War began in September, 1939. However, by 1939 the community had dozens of members, and the general level of well-being of the members rose significantly. By late 1930s many members had vehicles and, probably, some savings. In 1939 the community decided to build a church in the village of Benito, approximately equidistant from the numerous farms where members resided. Brothers Jack Koziol, Steve Roda (pastor), Fred Naydiuk

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94 *Evangel’ skaia vera*, 1-3 (1939), 14.
95 *The Church in the Valley*, 17.
and Alex Petelski took part in cutting lumber for the church in Alpine near the farm owned by the Blocha, also community members.  

It is worthwhile to mention that Jack Koziol left the church and the area in 1939 to become a famous and successful radio evangelist (see Illustration 5). Generations of Slavic Protestant believers in the USSR and beyond know and remember him under the name of Iakov Kozlov and his radio sermons broadcast from Toronto and Seoul, South Korea.  

The last mention of a church-wide event in Benito in Evangel’skaia vera occurred in 1939. Another “Spiritual and Edifying Conference” was going to be held in Benito in August of that year. In 1940 the last issue of the church magazine was published in Tallinn. The same year the publication stopped following the annexation of Estonia by the USSR. Already in 1939 the editorial board had to apologize before readers for publication and delivery delays caused by the war that was flaring up in Europe. The church-wide magazine would be resumed only in the early 1960s in Chicago under the name Evangel’skoe slovo (The Word of Gospel).  

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96 The Church in the Valley, 23.
97 A short biography of Iakov Kozlov (Koziol) compiled from different sources is found at a website devoted to prominent religious figures of the Russian diaspora worldwide at http://ruszarubezhi.ru/kl/K_429.htm (URL valid as of April 10th, 2010). The translation of Kozlov’s biography follows: “Iakov Kozlov was born in 1919 in the city of Rovno in the Ukraine into a Protestant family. In 1937 his family moved to Canada. He studied at a Bible Institute in the Canadian province of Alberta for five years, and graduated from it in 1951. For two years he was a pastor of the Evangelical Baptist church in the city of St Catharine’s in Ontario, Canada. From 1957 Iakov Kozlov had been working at a Christian radio station in [South] Korea for twelve years along with his wife and a son. From 1969 till 1978, after his naturalization as a US citizen, he continued his work as a radio evangelist in the Philippines. In 1978 the Kozlovs returned to the United States of America. From that time on he worked as a director of the Russian department of the Christian mission “Far-East Broadcasting.” According to some reports, he also co-operated with the “Light in the East” (Licht im Osten) mission, Korntal, Germany. He worked as the host of the “Gospel Message” radio programs which were broadcast from the island of Saipan (USA) onto the territory of the former USSR. He died on 25th of October, 2003 in California.”
98 Evangel’skaia vera, 7-8 (1939), 16.
In 1941 the construction of the church was finished. However, the immigration from Europe stopped for a while in the time of war to resume only later, after 1945. However, the membership was increasing thanks to a high birth rate among the church members who often had fairly large families.

Another development that started to affect the community from early on was acculturation of children of the newcomers in the Canadian setting. Children born to recent immigrants became Canadian citizens by birth in the country. They attended English schools, and, generally, were exposed to the English language and Canadian culture from early on. At the same time, communication at church, in family, and, often among friends and neighbours was conducted in the heritage language. However, the second generation of Slavic Evangelical Christians, including those born in late 1920s and early 1930s were fully bilingual. They maintained their heritage language since in many cases this was the only way to communicate to their parents who often never in their lifetime acquired proficiency in English. Church served as another medium of keeping the language alive, since members born and raised outside Canada occupied positions of importance in the church for the few first decades of the existence of the community. A large number of Slavic-speaking people around Benito, especially Doukhobors and Galician Ukrainians, provided an important communication network capable of motivating the young generation to use their heritage language actively. It was the third generation of Slavic Evangelicals in Benito (mostly people born after the WWII) that largely lost the knowledge of the heritage language.

The Benito congregation maintained active contacts with other like-minded churches. Although it was the only Slavic church of Evangelical Christians (Prokhanovite)

99 *Evangel'skaia vera*, 5 (1932), 11.
in Manitoba, there were other churches belonging to the same brotherhood in neighbouring Saskatchewan. Benito had particularly close ties with a geographically closest church of a village called Kuroki. Located about 140 kilometres away (as the crow flies) from Benito, Kuroki and area were populated by farmers, many of them of Ukrainian origin. The Evangelical community in Kuroki was formally established in 1942 and built its own meeting hall. The members of the Benito congregation considered Kuroki a “sister church.”

By the end the early period of its history (1945) the Benito church members were predominantly Ukrainian. The Russian component was provided by converted Doukhobors (no more than ten members) and one or two other families that were likely Russian. A few families were Belorussian (ten or so members at most). Therefore, members of the Ukrainian origin comprised about 90% of the approximately 200 members the church had by the end of the period.

Conclusion

The beginnings of the Benito church may be traced back to the influx of Ukrainian immigrants from the region of Volhynia, which belonged at that time to Poland in late 1920s. Before becoming part of Poland, the region had been a province of the Russian empire for an extended period of time. Many of the newcomers (although not all) were Evangelical Christians before their immigration to Canada. Although an overwhelming majority of Canadian Ukrainians were either Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate),

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100 Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 331.
101 *Church in the Valley*, 43.
or Orthodox, they formed a number of Ukrainian Protestant (mostly Baptist) churches
due to the proselytising work of English and German missionaries among them.

Evangelical Christians, in spite of their doctrinal similarities with the Baptists,
were a distinct denomination. Besides, Volhynian Ukrainians were different from
Galicians in that they had lived in the Russian state for generations and had marked
cultural and dialectal differences from the Galicians. Volhynian Ukrainians were well
aware of their cultural, linguistic, spiritual and political ties to the Russian people.
Evangelical Christianity was brought to Volhynia from St. Petersburg, the historical
centre of that church in Russia. Therefore, the Benito Evangelicals chose to join the
Prokhanovite union in Canada as soon as it was established, and identify as a Russian-
Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians, an open church home for all like-minded
Slavic believers.

Their close contacts with the Doukhobors and the interpersonal relationships and
friendships that developed as a result, contributed to the multi-ethnic character and
attitudes of the Benito church. The Benito community stood out for its ethnic, linguistic
and cultural inclusiveness and non-involvement in politics at any level. From its first
years the church in Benito, following non-denominational vision of Slavic Evangelicals,
regarded itself as a part of larger world of evangelicalism. The Benito church, as well as
other communities of the movement, maintained friendly and close relations with
English-speaking evangelicals, Mennonites, and other religious bodies they considered
like-minded. Main tendencies in the development of the Benito community of the period
replicated or paralleled identical developments within the broader world of Canadian
evangelicalism. Some of them were the involvement with the Bible school movement,
home and foreign mission, and Christian radio broadcasting. These tendencies point to
the fact that Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada was an instance of Canadian ethnic
evangelicalism.

Early Slavic Evangelical settlers faced a number of challenges upon their arrival
to Canada. They struggled for survival in the midst of the economic downturn and, later,
for a better future for their children. They found and affirmed their own religious and
ethnic identity in an environment of unstable and changing religious and ethnic
boundaries. However, possibly, the greatest metamorphosis they unwittingly underwent
was their sudden transformation from members of a religious minority in the old country
into part of the Canadian religious mainstream. This, as we shall see in the following
chapters, had a powerful effect upon their fate as a distinct group of Slavic Canadians.

In the early period members of the Benito church, most of them foreign born
immigrants, maintained the native tongue as the primary means of family and group
communication, while the church community reinforced the use of the language. At the
same time, while first generations settlers had a limited knowledge of the English
language, the second generation was already fully bilingual. Yet, the heritage language
remained the only feasible means of communication between members of different
generations. The early period was also the time of the rapid numerical growth of the
church, due to high birthrate and a steady immigration from Poland.

By 1901, that is, about thirty years after their immigration to Canada, among
“Russian” Mennonites of the Hanover district in Manitoba “not a single Hanover child
between ages three and five was able to speak English.”

In general, the level of the English proficiency among Mennonite settlers was very low even after a few decades of

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102 Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 76.
their life in Canada due to their closed lifestyle and multiple economic and social connections within the community which made outside contacts unnecessary, especially for women and small children. Slavic Evangelicals followed a different pattern. While trying to maintain the heritage language, they saw English proficiency as a way to succeed in the new environment. Their religious affiliation effectively made the Slavic Evangelicals a part of the Canadian religious mainstream, rather than emphasized their separation from the rest of the society as in the case of the Mennonites.

At an early stage, the Prokhanovite brotherhood of diaspora churches was still enthusiastic about the new stage of the worldwide reformation, the renewal of the Christian faith and commitment, or the “revolution of the spirit,” and Slavic churches of Evangelical Christians were seen as the ferment of this great movement on a global scale. The emergence and the early period in the history of the congregation coincided with the sojourn of Ivan Prokhanov in Canada and his personal involvement in the affairs of the emerging Slavic Evangelical Union of Canada. This boosted the activities of the church, and strengthened the motivation, dedication, and creativity of its pioneering members. The figure of Prokhanov was a truly charismatic one. Even given the democratic character of Evangelical community and the collegial management of church affairs, Prokhanov provided his followers with genuinely charismatic leadership, which, according to Weber, is “the greatest revolutionary force.” At the time the Benito church emerged, the Slavic Evangelical movement maintained its belief in the imminent

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103 Shenderovskii quotes Prokhanov’s spiritual testimony as of 1933 (Evangelical Christians, 392-92):
“This [new] propagation of Gospel should be done in the spirit of the original apostolic preaching, and should have “the restoration of original Christianity” as its motto. There is no other Christian organization [sic!] which would be as ready for this task as the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians.”

spiritual revolution and in a great mission to the Slavic peoples. These hopes were
doomed to fade at a later stage, after the death of Ivan Prokhanov in 1935, the fusion of
the Evangelical Christians with the Baptists in the USSR in 1944, and the cutting off
contacts with Evangelical Christians in Eastern Europe.
Illustration 1. Handwritten minutes of one of the early business meetings of the Benito congregation, July 24th, 1930. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. M. Gnida
Illustration 2. The interior of the Kamsack Doukhobor Prayer Home. Benito Evangelical Christians frequently used its premises for their reunions.
Illustration 3. The Grand Forks Doukhobor choir in front of the Benito Evangelical church. 1960s. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Gnida.

Used with the permission of the website owner.
Chapter V. War and Post-war Years: The Highest Point and the First Signs of Decline, 1945 - early 1960s

This chapter is devoted to the second period in the life of the Benito church of Evangelical Christians. This period lasted from the end of World War II till the early 1960s. Numerically it was the apex of the church membership and culmination of its activities which included foreign mission, radio broadcasting, and training courses. At the same time the developments, which later contributed to the church’s decline and disintegration were already underway.

Unlike the earlier period, the second stage of the Benito church’s history was witnessed by a group of surviving members, so their narratives are largely based upon their own memories rather than upon stories told by first-generation members who have had long passed away. The publication of a church-wide periodical of Slavic Evangelical Christians stopped in 1940, following the war in Europe, to resume only in the early 1960s. The second stage is the story of the second generation of pioneers, born in Canada, bilingual, and acculturated. This is also the story of the second wave of immigrants, of those who came after World War II. They brought along new experiences, new hopes, and a new vision. At that, they were another generation of newcomers, who were to undergo their own process of acculturation. What was more problematic for the survival of the community is that they were the last large wave of newcomers from Eastern Europe that reached the Canadian shores before the Iron Curtain fell down. Besides, they had been the last possible wave of Evangelical newcomers before the church of Slavic Evangelical Christians ceased to exist as an independent movement in its historical
strongholds, in the USSR (1944) and in Poland (the late 1940s and early 1950s), which led to a profound crisis within the movement and meant a drastic change in the demographics of the Slavic Evangelicals in Canada and beyond.

**War and Its Effect on the Benito Church**

By 1945, the year the war ended, the Benito congregation was an established church with about two hundred members, orderly and diverse community life, its own building, and a membership that felt to a high degree integrated into Canadian life through their desire to succeed and due to a closeness of their faith to that of other Canadian Protestants. Many sectarian groups in the old country, particularly during the Civil War in Russia (1918 - early 1920s), often displayed pacifist inclinations. Dissidents often made use of a conscientious objector status introduced by the Bolshevik government soon after the Revolution of 1917. That sectarian pacifism largely (but not completely) vanished a few years later when the Soviet government took a much stricter approach towards religious pacifism and withdrew its concessions to CO’s.¹ Russian Protestants decided that to serve or not in the military was a matter of conscience for each individual believer. During World War II Evangelical Christians in the USSR actively supported the Soviet Army with voluntary donations. Although cases of draft evasion or refusal to bear arms did occur, most Evangelical Christians subject to the draft fought in the army as combatants.²

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Slavic Evangelical Christians in Benito had been living in Canada for about ten years by the time the war broke out. However, based upon the memories of the surviving church members, their families were not directly affected by the war. In fact, the construction of the church building, the first large project the community undertook, took place during the war years (1939-1941). However, this does not mean that the church did not feel the effects of the war in Europe, for the war triggered a new wave of a mass exodus of Slavic Evangelical Christians to the New World.

The Mennonite communities in the Canadian Prairies, along with Slavic Evangelicals experienced a major influx of new immigrants. According to Ted Regehr, there were up to 14,000 Soviet, Prussian, and Danzig Mennonites among almost one million of the post-war refugees who were unable or unwilling to return home.\(^3\) Large Mennonite migrations from Russia occurred in the 1870s and 1920s. With the beginning of the war a large percentage of the German population (including Mennonites) of the USSR was deported by the Stalinist government to Kazakhstan for the fear that ethnic Germans might support advancing Nazi troops.\(^4\) Nevertheless, the advance of the German troops was so rapid that thousands of Mennonites found themselves on the territory occupied by the Nazis during the first months of the war with the USSR.\(^5\) In 1943 Mennonites living on German occupied territories were evacuated westward by retreating German troops. After the war they found themselves in refugee camps. The Mennonite Central Committee was especially instrumental in assisting the migration of post-war

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Mennonite refugees. Between 1947 and 1951 over 7,600 displaced Mennonites immigrated to Canada with assistance of IRO (International Refugee Organization) and the MCC, while a number of other Mennonites went to South America. As a result, “almost all the refugees from the Soviet Union who wished to do so, were able to migrate to North or South America.”

Soon after the war the Benito church members also got involved in an undertaking of a charitable nature. They sponsored displaced persons from Europe to come to Canada. Causes that prevented Slavic people from returning to their previous place of residence following the end of the war, were diverse. Many of them were citizens of Eastern European countries, forcibly sent by the Nazis to Germany as workers during the war, and unwilling to return to Communist run states, while some might be former Nazi collaborators from Eastern Europe. Many lands around the globe accepted those refugees, and about 158,000 came to Canada. Normally, there were two ways for the DP’s to get to Canada. They either signed an agreement to work temporarily where there was a workforce shortage in Canada, or else they could be sponsored by family and friends already residing in the country. Those in temporary positions received their permanent residence over time, and could then move anywhere within Canada. The statistics of the Mennonite migrants to Canada in the 1940s demonstrate that out of the total of 7,698 Mennonite immigrants between 1947 and 1951 as many as 6,101 immigrated under close relative scheme, while others had work contracts, later converted into permanent residency.

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8 Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970, 94.
Benito Evangelicals individually sponsored a number of families to come to Canada. Sometimes, but not always, they were relatives. “The Malachov family sponsored Mike and Lucy Pysk and children; the Yanchuk family sponsored Peter and Maria Yakubowich and children; Paul Bielik sponsored his nephew Serge Bychkowski; Fred Soloway sponsored his nephew Serge Radchuk.”

Often families were sponsored simply because they were fellow believers. Such was the case with the Melnycks and the Pysks.

Most of these more recent immigrants, even those who tried their luck in Benito, did not become farmers. Many of them eventually left the Benito area and moved to larger cities. Others stayed, attracted by a thriving church community and a supporting network of the like-minded. This parallels the development within the Mennonite community in Canada in post-war years, defined by Royden Loewen as the “making of the Mennonite middle class.”

Loewen discussed effects of modernity both in the rural and small town setting. In the latter case those among Prairie Mennonites who took up town occupations were essentially former farmers or their children “unable or unwilling” to continue their farm work. According to Regehr, many Mennonite migrants of the 1940s hoped to farm. Eventually “few were able to acquire their own farms. Instead, they joined, and sometimes led, the Mennonite migration into the cities.”

In the case of the Slavic Evangelicals in Benito, in addition to the same pattern, there were post-war immigrants who took up town professions because it better suited their lifestyle goals (such as Serge Radchuk who became a Winnipeg lawyer) or matched their previous experience prior to their arrival to Benito. For those immigrants their sojourn in Benito

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9 The Church in the Valley, Lydia McKinnon, compiler (Winnipeg, 1985), 37.
10 Loewen, Diaspora in the Countryside, 58-81
was of a temporary and transitory nature. There is no statistics in the possession of the author on the percentage of post-war Slavic Evangelical refugees who came under family sponsorship and under work contracts. Yet, based upon data on all Ukrainian immigrants to Canada of the period, the relative share of those who came under a family scheme appears to be lower than in the case of Mennonites.\(^{12}\)

**A Case Study**

This section is based mainly upon an interview with a former active member and a long-time secretary of the Benito congregation. He was among those who came to Benito with the second wave of Slavic evangelical immigration into Canada. An elderly man of over 80 years of age, A. was born in 1926 in Poland near Brest. In 1939 the territory was annexed by the USSR and became part of the Soviet Republic of Belorussia. Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union two years later, in June 1941, and Belorussia became one of the first Soviet territories occupied by the Nazis. Belorussia was liberated by the Red Army only in 1944. According to John Sadouski, a Canadian Belorussian author, “During the German occupation (1941-1944) about 380,000 Byelorussians, predominantly young people, were taken to Germany as forced labourers. Many died because of inhuman working and living conditions. There were also military prisoners, both from the Polish and the Red armies, since many young Byelorussian men were compelled to serve in one or the other.”\(^{13}\)

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An interview with A., a native of present-day Belorussia (province of Brest), and a former war-time DP, who chose to stay in Benito, took place in his house. Mr. A. was an elderly man in his early eighties, with somewhat impaired hearing. When the interviewer called Mr. A. over the phone to set up an appointment, it took Mr. A. much time, and, apparently, effort, to understand the purpose of the interview. It was hard for him to believe that an outsider from far-away would want to learn about the Benito church out of academic interest. The recurring idiom during the preliminary phone conversation was “I don’t know.” Mr. A. also initially suggested *The Church in the Valley* as a better source of information than him. He agreed to the interview somewhat reluctantly. However, upon a personal meeting and as the conversation began, Mr. A. felt much more relaxed. He turned to be an able narrator, and his speech was fairly emotional. Mr. A. accompanied it with gestures, pauses, and exclamations. He seemingly enjoyed his own narrative. The main theme of his chronologically consistent and orderly narrative was the war and his personal experiences during the war and shortly thereafter. He devoted more space in his narrative to the 1940s than to the whole period after he got established in Benito. In terms of a narrative mode A.’s story combined the personal mode (especially when he described his war-time experience and migration to Canada) and the collective mode when he talked about the church.\(^{14}\)

A.: Hitler started a war with Stalin, and… Hitler almost reached Moscow. At that time, 1942, they took me to Germany to work. I was sixteen years old at that time. I remained in Germany for five years. At first they put me to work at a factory,

and then someone came and took me from the factory to a bakery. I worked there for three years. He [the bakery owner] was a [Nazi] party member. He was dismissed from the army. He’d served in France, and had an accident there. He wasn’t a good man. His wife was [nice], though… And then [after the war ended] Stalin ordered to take his [subjects] back to Russia. But I was born in Poland, lived in Poland, and I went to a Polish [DP] camp.15

The informant spoke very good Russian (with distinct western Russian or Belorussian flavour). It felt like he spoke Russian with much more ease than English. He said that he received most of his education in the Polish language, although he spoke a dialect of Russian at home. He said that after the Soviet annexation in September 1939 the education was switched to Belorussian, which he nevertheless did not acknowledge as his native tongue. He said that the Belorussian language as it was taught at school bore a fair share of resemblance to his home dialect, but he insisted that he had spoken Russian. He defined the language he had spoken at home as “village Russian,” and in Mr. A’s own words, his home dialect was in about the same relationship to the standard Russian as a Mennonite dialect of German known as Plattdeutsch was to High German (Hochdeutsch).

According to Sadouski, “Western Belorussians could not improve their standard of living because of the Polish government’s policy of keeping the Belorussian provinces backward.”16 However, apparently, two or three years of Stalinist rule hardly won much sympathy and allegiance of many residents of former Polish territories, either. Our informant chose to go to a Polish DP camp over repatriation to Soviet Belorussia, along

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with many forced labourers and prisoners of war of Western Belorussian origin. Shortly after the end of the war in 1945 the population of the camp started to leave for different countries, such as England, France, USA, Canada, Australia and Argentina. Mr. A. left for Ontario, and then moved to Winnipeg and, finally, to Benito:

A.: They [apparently Canadian immigration agents] came from Canada [looking for] younger people, those who wanted to work in the woods [logging industry]. I signed up. I was in Ontario one autumn and one winter. After you had stayed there in Ontario for ten months, you were free. We simply had to stay there in Ontario, and then they set us free to go wherever we wished. And here [in Benito] there were some people from my locality [near Brest, Belorussia]… I wrote to them, and they wrote to me. I was already in Winnipeg. Their son was getting married, and he asked me to come to the wedding and be his best man. I came and stayed here.

Belorussians, due to cultural and historical reasons, rarely founded their own ethnic religious or social organizations. They usually joined Russian (a majority, especially those of Orthodox faith), Polish (those of Catholic faith), or Ukrainian churches. Speaking of Belorussian Protestants, only in 1973 was a Belorussian Evangelical Baptist Fraternity in North America established in Erie, Pennsylvania.

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Interviewer: Were you a member of the church of Evangelical Christians while in Poland?

A.: No, I was Orthodox there. But in Germany they started having meetings…

There were many of us, they converted [to Christ], and started attending [meetings]. I was baptized there, in Germany.

Int.: Were the preachers Russians and Ukrainians?

A.: Yes, both Russians and Ukrainians, there were [preachers] from Russia. They were good preachers. And the Germans allowed us to hold our meetings in their church.

Int.: Where in Germany was it?

A.: Well, as they used to call it, it was West Germany, that particular town…, which had about ten thousand people, Niedermarsberg. There was another small town nearby, Obermarsberg, where I lived. There were larger cities to the west, they were almost all destroyed… bombed… Kassel, do you know Kassel? I’m not sure, may be it was 60 kilometres from us.19

The union of Evangelical Christians tried to provide Slavic DP’s with spiritual, and, whenever possible, practical help. Especially active was the Light in the East (Licht im Osten), a non-confessional Christian organization founded soon after World War I, initially to minister among Russian prisoners of war and later among Russian-speaking population in general. Evangelical Christians residing in Germany, including those of Russian-German origin, were especially active in that work. Some of the leaders of Licht im Osten, for instance, Jakob Kroeker and Walter Jacques were at the same time leaders

of the Prokhanovite Union in Europe. Kroeker, born and raised in Russia, was of Mennonite background. He was well known in Russia as a preacher both among German-speaking and Russian-speaking Evangelical believers, and a regular participant at annual conferences held by the Prokhanovite Union in St. Petersburg. Kroeker was in Germany when the war between Russia and Germany broke out in August 1914. He stayed in Germany, and soon became active in missionary outreach and charitable work German Evangelicals organized for Russian prisoners of war.20 Walter Jacques, a German national and a graduate of the Theological Department of the University of Halle, moved to Russia in 1906 as a missionary. He settled in the village of Astrakhanka in what is now southern Ukraine, a stronghold of Molokan and Evangelical sectarians. Soon Jacques became affiliated with the Evangelical Union led by Ivan Prokhanov. After his return to Germany in 1918, he was active in the work of the Licht im Osten. In 1937, following the death of Prokhanov, and in accordance with the spiritual will of the latter, Jacques was elected the honorary chairman of the Worldwide Union of Evangelical Christians at the conference in Warsaw.21

Most DP’s were not Evangelical believers, although there were some notable exceptions. A. told about a group of Mennonites from Russia that worked in the lumber industry in Ontario together with him:

A.: When I was in Ontario at that sawmill… there were forty Mennonites there. They came from Russia and spoke Russian. But it was like this – twenty of them were “free” (svobodnye) Mennonites, they were generally the same as other people, they could smoke, they could [drink alcohol], and other twenty of them were more or less like Evangelical Christians or Baptists, they didn’t smoke, didn’t [drink], they avoided all these things. We… had joint [worship] meetings with them, together with those Mennonites. They had a preacher, a good, quiet man, and we had two preachers that came along to the woods [in Ontario].

In all probability, here the informant referred the group of Mennonites, which appeared on the statistics brought up by Ted Regehr, and based upon the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization data. Although most Mennonite migrants were sponsored by relatives, there were some who came to Canada as temporary workers in different fields. Along with miners, railway workers, domestic servants a group of 41 forestry workers is mentioned. The informant could not have met many Mennonites in his native village or while working in Germany. In all probability, his awareness of a Mennonite dialect of German comes from his acquaintance with the group of Russian (or East Prussian) Mennonites in Ontario.

Displaced persons in European post-war camps were a motley crew. They often represented ethnic and political groups that were enemies during the war, such as Jews and Nazi collaborators. A. acknowledged a problem of inter-ethnic and political tensions

22 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
23 Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970, 94.
among different groups of DP’s during his stay in the camp. One story he told is especially exemplary:

A.: It happened in Germany, in that German camp. There were about ten thousand of us there, where their army used to be housed [army barracks]… We stayed there for about a year after the war… There were Ukrainians from Poland, there were “pure” Poles… Some were good people, just like in any nation I met good and not so good people. When we were there, some Ukrainians, only some of them, were very zealous (zavziatye). The “Russian” Ukrainians were not as zealous, but only those who lived under Poles, in the lands that belonged to Poland. Some of them were very nationalist, it’s a shame. They mostly supported Hitler… [Once] there was grass all around, warm weather, we laid down on the grass, and two Ukrainians passed by. I knew them, and they knew me. One of them asked me: “How is Stalin doing?” If I were a Stalinist, I would have gone back to Stalin [to the Soviet Union]! I answered him: “Stalin is doing all right, and how is Hitler?” He came up to me and lifted up his foot [to hit me]. At that time I had not been baptized yet [and believed it was ok to fight]. So he lifted up his leg and said he would kick me. I rose to my feet, all shivering, and told him: “Go ahead, just touch me!”… And he left, you know. I thought to myself, who are you to reproach me for Stalin, I’m against Stalin, and I don’t go back to Stalin. But when I said something against Hitler, he got mad.

Int.: Have you had people like that here [in Benito or nearby] as well?
A.: No, I don’t know any. We didn’t have anyone like that.24

For a story that happened about sixty years ago, the informant remembered the circumstances (the weather and the setting, the verbatim contents of the dialogue) surprisingly well. He became quite agitated as he was telling this episode, demonstrating with gestures how the fight was about to begin. Probably, the episode came to be a part of his oral autobiography, and he had repeatedly narrated it before to other people. In any case, it seemed like A.’s feelings were genuinely hurt when his opponents suggested he might have been a Stalinist. As the earlier conversation showed, A.’s ethnic self-identification was somewhat complicated. He at various times during the interview tacitly or explicitly suggested that he was a Belorussian, a Polish national, and a native speaker of Russian. Possibly, the episode in the camp (A. was about twenty years of age at that time) was memorable as the instance of blatant nationalism and political militancy where he least expected it. After all, his opponents were displaced persons just like himself, and speakers of a closely related language he could easily understand. It is not clear from the interview whether he was baptized by Baptist, Evangelical Christian, or some other ministers. He certainly sounded like he did not make much distinction between like-minded Christians. But A.’s decision to eventually join a church so consistent in its rejection of nationalism of any sort after a stay in Ontario and Winnipeg sounded like a thought-out decision. Later during the interview A. returned to the language situation in the Benito church, and elaborated on the topic of nationalism.

This story illustrates on a popular level the post-war influx of politicized

24 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
immigrants from Western Ukraine, into the Canadian Ukrainian community, mentioned by Rea and Gerus, some of them former Nazi supporters or collaborators. Although this development, it seems, did not interfere directly with the life of the Benito congregation or nearby Ukrainian population, it did influence to some extent Ukrainian Protestantism in North America. According to Troper and Weinfeld, “the post-war nationalist camp was most entrenched in Toronto – less so in western Canada. In western Canada the critical mass of pre-war Ukrainian Canadians was large enough to partly deflect the onslaught of the post-war nationalist political agenda. In southern Ontario and Quebec nationalists dominated.”

We discussed in Chapter I the russophobic approach to the interpretation of the history of Ukrainian Protestantism. This tendency strove to prove, by way of silencing or manipulating historical facts, that Ukrainian Protestantism had nothing to do with the Evangelical movement in Russia, of which Ukrainian Stundism was an inalienable and important part. This approach took shape after World War II, and it goes back to the emergence of anti-Communist political activism and nationalistic sentiments among some, particularly new, members of the Ukrainian community in Canada. There is no doubt that the Stalinist method of administration in Western Ukraine following its incorporation into the USSR in 1939, forced agrarian collectivization and an attack on religion, provoked mass discontent and prepared fertile soil for a nationalist insurgence in Western Ukraine, completely suppressed by the Soviet Army only in the early 1950s.

See, for instance, Ephraim Zuroff, Occupation - Nazi-hunter: The Continuing Search for the Perpetrators of the Holocaust (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1994) on thousands of former Nazis who found refuge in Allied countries after the war. The legislation allowing prosecuting Nazi war criminals was passed in Canada only in 1980s. Particularly, an entire Western Ukrainian Waffen SS division “Galicia” (Ukr. Halychyna) was admitted to Canada in 1952 in spite of protests of the Canadian Jewish community and the left wing of the political spectrum.

Interviewer: You came here in 1947 or 1948, didn’t you?


Interviewer: And you joined the church here.

A.: Oh yes, there was a church, and she [informant’s wife] was attending that church. There were a fair number of members in the church at that time. Some of them were newcomers like me. But there was not much work, and younger folks were little by little moving out of the area. But there were a fair number of people [in the church].

Int.: How many people were there approximately in the church when you arrived?

Inf.: Maybe, 60 or 70 members. But I can’t tell you for sure.27

According to other testimonies (Mike Gnida), the church had many more members at its peak. Retrospectively, though, the last decades of the life of the church was perceived by A. as a time of a gradual decline, which could prompt him to indicate a low membership figure. The informant, after getting married to a daughter of first-wave settlers, started his own farm, and, apparently, lived a reasonably happy life in the Benito area. At the time of the interview, the man in his eighties still worked on his farm some ten kilometres away from Benito.

In any case, the trend to move out of rural Manitoba was already present among younger Slavic Evangelicals as of the late 1940s. Younger people, some of them born, and all of them raised in Canada, were fully bilingual, which helped them to find suitable employment outside the farm setting. Besides, they did not have that desire to acquire land and establish their own farm, characteristic of their parents, landless peasants from

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27 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
densely populated eastern Poland. They saw other perspectives in life, which very often
drove them away from their parents’ farms, to Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and elsewhere in
Canada. As Regehr pointed out, “after the war it became obvious that there were other,
more predictable and secure ways to make a living.”

Unlike Doukhobors or Hutterites, Slavic Evangelicals never objected to education at any level. Getting a post-secondary
education was one of the reasons young people left for urban centres. Yet, the influx of
post-war immigrants, such as A., maintained a positive demographical balance in the
church community. The relative growth of the community in the post-war decade or two
contrasted with the general tendency in rural Manitoba. According to Gerald Friesen,
after 1940 “the province [of Manitoba] was not really growing; indeed it was unable to
maintain its natural increase. The change was particularly evident in rural areas.”

During the war and post-war period church worship, including preaching, singing,
and prayer, was exclusively in Russian or Ukrainian. The only exception was made for
English-speaking guests, especially preachers, which indicates that contacts with
mainstream Canadian evangelicalism, which began early in the 1930s, were continued.
This trend was characteristic of other communities of Slavic Evangelical Christians as
well. Some missionary Mayfield, who had served in Italy, attended a Spiritual and
Edifying Conference, which took place in Toronto in May, 1962. He preached in English,
and read Psalm 1 in English and Italian. Other “English” guests also attended that
Conference. A. explained:

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29 Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press,
1984), 419.
Interviewer: For as long as you gathered, did you have everything in Russian or Ukrainian, that is, singing and sermons?
A.:. Yes, they read in Russian.

Interviewer: Was there anything in English?
A.:. In English… no, there wasn’t anything. Though when an anglik31 came, then they had it in English. He [the guest] would preach in English. There were English speaking missionaries that used to visit us. But usually it was, as I would say, in our language (po-nashemu), and nobody had any complaints as to why it’s not pure Russian or pure Ukrainian. Everybody agreed. Because, you know, there are some [outside the Benito church] that complain, [saying] “this should only be in our native Ukrainian language.” We did not have things like that.32

Here the informant returned to the issue of nationalism without being prompted to do so by the interviewer. Although no concrete reason was given, and the interviewer did not feel comfortable enough to ask, it felt like there might have been a good reason for Mr. A. to dwell on that issue. It might have been a traumatic experience as a forced labourer in Nazi Germany, tension in the DP camp, or a subsequent experience in Canada (of which we are not aware). Yet, it would be safe to conclude that the emphasis on the all-Slavic character of the Benito church with its open character and absence of nationalism was continued as an aspect of the church life A. especially valued.

The Benito congregation followed in the tradition of a long-standing tradition of Slavic Evangelicals as the multicultural and poly-ethnic movement, and rejected

31 Pronounced [un-glEEk], a name for white English-speaking Canadians used especially among the Doukhobors.
32 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
nationalism of any kind. Other members of the church whom we had an opportunity to interview, including ethnic Ukrainians, support the same view. The last deacon of the Benito church, a Canadian-born Ukrainian, thus answered the question about inter-ethnic relationship within and outside the church community:

Mike Gnida: There were Ukrainians that did not like Russian people for some reason, because of something that had happened there in Russia, maybe you know more about it… As for us, both Hania [informant’s wife] and I, we are Ukrainians, but I like talking in Russian.

Interviewer: So your church did not have any problems of this sort.

M.G.: No, I don’t think so. As far as I understand, we did not have that problem.33

The fact that there was no such problem within the church does not mean that it did not exist in a wider environment Benito members shared with others. Both A. and Mr. Gnida tacitly refused to provide additional information on nationalism or ethnic (or political) tension with any other group. Nonetheless, their ready acknowledgement of the existence of the problem outside the church and equally ready negation of the problem within the church point to the continuing topicality of the Evangelical Christian traditional position as a Slavic and multi-ethnic church in the post-war years.

Although heritage languages absolutely dominated in the religious (and, probably, family) sphere, it was possible for most Benito members to listen to an English sermon, apparently without a translator, and make sense out of it. Evangel’skoe slovo, the official

33 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
periodical of the World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians, published in Chicago in the 1960s and 70s, frequently contained references to the language in which important services or meeting were held. The Spiritual and Edifying Conference of 1962 in Toronto was bilingual because of English Canadian preachers and guests. At least one Slavic preacher, Evgenii (Eugene) Dulin, also preached in English. The funeral service of Belorussia-born Khristina Isakovna Mazovik (1883-1964), a long-time member of the Chicago church of Evangelical Christians, was held in Russian and English. The funeral service of another Chicago member, Feodora Vorobei, was likewise bilingual. However, this trend was less obvious in Benito. An obituary in memoriam of A.I. Ianchuk (1903-1966), born in Volhynia, and a member of the Benito church, who also served as a deputy secretary of the Union of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada, did not contain any reference to anything read or sung in English at his funeral. It is hardly probable that preachers from English churches spoke at funerals in Chicago. Rather, some of the relatives of deceased Evangelical Christians were not fluent in the heritage language because of assimilation or intermarriage, the situation which, apparently, was less likely in Benito.

Life of the Church

The community life in the post-war period was becoming more sophisticated. A Bible Institute with the aim to prepare ministers and other Christian workers was

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established in the late 1930s and functioned in Benito until about 1943. In the wintertime the church offered a training course in music and choir singing. A diploma was given to those who graduated from the courses. An example of such a diploma indicates that the training lasted about a month. (See Illustration 1) The diploma identified the Benito church as a “community of Evangelical Christians,” and is composed in standard Russian with a few misspellings. Besides, there was also a course in the Russian and Ukrainian languages. This latter development is particularly significant, and points out that maintaining the heritage languages among the younger generation became a concern. Along with the educational efforts, the Evangelical community also formed committees to facilitate its outreach. In the early post-war years the church established a visiting committee with a purpose of “visiting distant members and potential members.” A Sunday school committee was also organized.

In the sphere of church life, the church formalized its choice of Stephen (Stepan) Roda as its permanent pastor through a ritual of ordination. The practice of ordination through the ritual of laying of hands was one of the practical differences between Evangelical Christians and Baptists. Evangelicals did not consider it a pre-requisite of the pastoral ministry, but rather as a special blessing given to a Christian worker who needed the spiritual support of the church. The fact that Mr. Roda had served as a pastor for at least two decades without being ordained points to the adherence of the Benito church to the traditional practices of Evangelical Christians. On the other hand, a sudden ordination

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38 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006. See Chapter VI for more information on the Bible Institute and Chapter VII for the analysis of the Bible school movement among Slavic Evangelical Christians within the context of Canadian evangelicalism.

39 The Church in the Valley, 27.

40 Ivan S. Prokhanov, Verouchenie Evangell’skh Khristisev (Confession of Faith of Evangelical Christians), quoted from Liudvig Shenderovskii, Evangel’skoe Khristianstvo. Vozrozhdennoe evangel’skoe dvizhenie v istoricheskoj khristianskoj tservke (Evangelical Christians. The Re-born Evangelical Movement within the Historical Christian Church) (Toronto: Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians, 1980), 492-93.
suggests a rapprochement between Slavic Evangelical Christians and Baptists and other mainstream Protestants. According to Mr. A.:

A.: There were special youth meetings, we had a choir… Many preachers came to visit. When I arrived, they didn’t yet have a permanent pastor. There was a pastor, but he wasn’t properly ordained.

Interviewer: Was Roda pastor at that time?
A.: Yes, he was a pastor, and later he was ordained.\textsuperscript{41}

The informant expressed the view that mandatory pastoral ordination was a proper way of doing things. This contradicts the basic and traditional teaching of Evangelical Christians on the optional character of formal ordination, and may be traced back to the times of Paskhov and Korf (neither of whom was ordained). The way A. shaped his discussion of the matter suggests that he could be converted to the Baptist faith in Germany, and acquired the Baptist understanding of ordination, and then joined the Evangelical Christian community because of convenience or family ties.

Steven Roda’s biography deserves a special place in this story. Born in Volhynia around 1905, Stepan (Steven in the anglicized form) Roda learned about Evangelical Christianity in 1926 while still living in Poland. He married Maria, and the young family immigrated to Canada in 1928 and settled in the Thunderhill area close to Benito, a district which at that time was being populated by Evangelicals from Poland. In 1933 Roda was baptised by the acting pastor Luke Naydiuk. Soon he became one of the leaders

\textsuperscript{41} Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
of the Thunderhill group, one of the two independent small groups of Slavic Evangelical Christians prior to the construction of a prayer home in Benito.

In April, 1941 Roda assumed the responsibilities of pastorship in Benito, following Luke Naydiuk’s departure for Ontario. He remained the pastor of the church for almost thirty-five years, until 1975. Roda never accepted any remuneration for his pastoral work, and farmed like most other members. He routinely spent hours in pastoral and missionary trips, visiting those living at a distance, and fulfilling other duties of a community leader. He enjoyed the unanimous respect and love of his church, and many former members attested to this.\(^{42}\) Rev. Roda never attended the Bible school and did not receive any systematic pastoral training. Our informant Mr. Gnida found surprising how well Roda could preach in spite of that, but the way he worded his narrative ("nevertheless, he could preach really well"), reveals that the informant valued education and considered it commendable for those in positions of spiritual authority:

Mike Gnida: Our pastor served us from 1941 till 1975. Then he had a stroke… He died in 1990. He was an unpaid pastor. The church wanted to give him something for it. But he said, “No, God blessed me, and I have the means for living.” He used to compose his sermons while he was working on a tractor [on his farm]. So God helped him. He used to say, “I have never attended a Bible school, I don’t even know how they open and close the doors at a Bible school.” And, nevertheless, he could preach really well. Many people repented [of their sins as he preached].\(^{43}\)

\(^{42}\) The Church in the Valley, 55.

\(^{43}\) Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
In addition to fairly traditional types of church activity, the 1950s brought about a new, pioneering kind of outreach, Christian broadcasting in the area in heritage languages. There were hardly any other Slavic churches of comparable size and remoteness that had their own radio broadcasting. *The Church in the Valley* stated: “In August 1957, a radio broadcast “Evangelical Word” was started over station CJGX, Yorkton, Saskatchewan.”

Interviewer: People from your church were involved in radio broadcasting, weren’t they?

A.: Yes, there was radio broadcasting; I don’t know how long it lasted. A few years, I can’t tell you for sure, maybe, four years.

In general, A. touched upon most other subjects except his war-time and post-war experience, almost in passing. Compared to vivid and colourful description of his DP camp experiences, his narrative of the life of the Benito church sounded emotionless and almost dull. A. was not sure (or did not want to think) of numbers or dates, and, likely, did not ascribe much importance to those details. Overall, he spoke of the church fondly, but without much personality or passion involved. Years of work and quiet family life in Benito were comparatively homogenous and uneventful routine versus fateful years of war, uncertainty in the camp, or a feeling of relief in Ontario.

The church became involved in a number of other missionary and charity projects worldwide, from the Canadian Bible Society and Slavic Gospel Mission to the Sudan

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44 *The Church in the Valley*, 43.
45 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
Interior Mission and a home for lepers in Paraguay. This involvement was usually limited to monetary donations to the cause, but, nonetheless, denoted the bond of a common purpose and common goals between Benito and Canadian evangelical mainstream. This was in line with a broad approach to Christian unity and interdenominational co-operation characteristic of the Slavic Evangelical Union from its early days.

Evangelical Christians and Baptists: Blurring Boundaries

Another general tendency within the Slavic Evangelical brotherhood worldwide that dates back to the post-war period was a sharp decline of its reformationist and messianic pretensions. Ivan Prokhanov, the charismatic leader of the worldwide community, died in 1935. The Polish branch of the church, one the strongest, was lost due to the annexation of Eastern Poland by the USSR in 1939 and a forced merger of Evangelicals with the Baptists in 1944. Most of what was left in Poland of the Evangelical movement was mostly absorbed by Polish Pentecostals. Evangelical Christians in other Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia) likewise found themselves under Communist regimes.

The hopes for a large-scale Gospel renewal or reformation in Russia were largely lost, since after the war Stalinism only strengthened its grip both in the USSR and Eastern Europe. As a result, the worldwide church of Evangelical Christians was increasingly aware that they were just a small group of Christians with weak leadership, reduced membership, and a prevailing sense of a failed reformation project. This by necessity

46 The Church in the Valley, 43.
47 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 279-281.
started to blur the boundaries between the Slavic Evangelicals or other similar groups. The largest such groups were Slavic and English-speaking Baptists.

The interview in the previous section mentioned visits of English-speaking preachers to the Benito church. As we saw, they were admitted to the pulpit, and addressed the community with sermons. There were other examples of increasing interaction between the Slavic Evangelicals and Baptists. Newcomers who converted in DP camps sometimes were not aware of differences between the two denominations.

A.: I didn’t see the difference between Evangelical Christians and Baptists. Because there were some Baptists here as well. For example, the Winnipeg [Ukrainian Baptist] church was a Baptist church. They used to visit us. They had the same baptism as we did.48

It was noted earlier that A. could be converted under the influence of and baptised by Baptist ministers. But even if so, this could not represent any difficulty for him or for the church community, and could not affect the integrity of the community, given its non-denominational character. On the other hand, A., not a Ukrainian, might feel more comfortable in a multi-ethnic, “Slavic” setting rather than in one of the Ukrainian Manitoban Baptist churches.

There were Baptists who chose to join the Benito church from the early 1940s. For instance, the family of the last deacon of the church was originally Baptist:

48 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
Mike Gnida: My father, we came from Minitonas, and we were Baptists. My father and mother were Baptists. Here, in Durban, we had a Baptist community, and rented a United Church building. There were, maybe, 70 of us. Finally my elder brother started to attend in Benito, because they had built a [prayer] house there in 1941.49

This trend of rapprochement with the Baptists and other similar Christian communities was not, of course, unique to the Benito church alone. Devoid of its charismatic leadership and its demographic epicentre in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the worldwide movement of the Slavic Evangelical Christians found itself in a difficult position. Its main raison d’être, namely, a large-scale evangelization of Russia and a reformation there, was no longer feasible. The movement had to redefine its identity and find new validation for its existence. At the same time, Evangelical Christians had to reconfigure their stand towards the Baptist church, especially in the light of the merger of the two unions in the USSR in 1944.

There was deep discord between the Baptists and the Evangelical Christians in the USSR as of early 1930s (please see Chapter II). Liudvig Shenderovskii was very laconic about the history of the Evangelical Christians in the USSR from 1929 when the discriminatory religious law was passed until 1944. According to him, remnants of the Baptist Union, illegal or semi-legal since 1935, joined the Evangelical Union. There were 28 Evangelical participants at the unification conference against 19 members of the Baptist church.50 However, in spite of the fact that the Evangelical Christians were in

49 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
50 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 172.
better shape organizationally, the united church had gradually acquired the Baptist identity and was perceived, both within and outside the USSR, as a Baptist church. This happened mainly because the weight and calibre of the Baptist church worldwide by far surpassed the Evangelical Christian movement, which largely remained a church of East Slavs. The restrictive policies towards religion in general in the USSR for a prolonged period of time also played their role. Therefore, one of the main differences of the Evangelical Christians from the Baptists, that is, their messianic vision of the all-encompassing spiritual revolution and reorganization of Russia, and, then, of the whole world, was increasingly becoming irrelevant. Evangelical participation in politics and economics turned out to be absolutely impossible in the Stalinist Soviet Union, and, after WWII, in the rest of Eastern Europe. In the absence of the main point of discord, comparatively minor theological and organizational dissonances were easier to settle. Among other things, the statutes adopted at the unification conference contained a provision for the introduction of ordination through the laying on of hands, according to the Baptist practice. Local churches were instructed to have properly ordained ministers.51

Nevertheless, messianic claims were not left out completely. Shenderovskii quoted Aleksandr Vasil’evich Karev (1894-1971), a long-time leader of Evangelical Christians and a close co-worker of Ivan Prokhanov, as saying that “the saddest fact about contemporary Western Christianity, including the Baptists, is that it has lost the apostolic spirit, the spirit of universal priesthood, and the spirit of simplicity. Therefore, anyone who wants to find a country on earth which has a church resembling that in apostolic days, with all the attributes of primitive Christianity, would have to point to the

51 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 175.
Soviet Union.” Of course, a careful reader may discern here a subtle irony, for persecution at the hand of authorities was certainly one of the “attributes of primitive Christianity.” However, there is no reason to doubt that Karev, just like Ivan Prokhanov, and other Evangelical Christians of the older generation, did believe in a special messianic role of his movement, and a providential role of Russia and its people in the coming second and complete Reformation, even long after the merger of 1944 and the death of Prokhanov.

Aleksandr Karev had been secretary general of the AUCECB from the moment of the unification in 1944 till his death in 1971. Shenderovskii, in his review of the united church of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR, especially emphasized the personal qualities of Karev that were especially valuable for Evangelical Christians, such as openness and ecumenism. Shenderovskii quotes Karev as saying: “My mother… put me into a German boarding school [in pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg]. It was a Lutheran boarding school, and I got to love Lutherans. From that time on I developed my desire for ecumenism, and love for all Christians.”

Shenderovskii, a resident of Canada at the time of writing, of course, was well aware of the fact that the worldwide movement of Evangelical Christians was significantly weakened with the merger of 1944. However, he carefully pointed to any indication of continuity between the former independent Prokhanovite Union, and the AUCECB, and the vitality of the distinctly Evangelical traditions within the latter.

53 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 198.
54 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 216.
1960s: Division and the Language Issue

Although the 1950s were in the perception of former members, as well as objectively, the apex of the Benito church, towards the late 1950s it had to face a very challenging situation. The church split into two factions. The history of the church, compiled by its former members, says: “In the late 1950s, when the church was experiencing its highest point, Satan stepped in and tore it apart. The next few years were painful for many of the members, and the membership continued to decline.”55 The formal reason for the division, however, came from outside the Benito congregation. A confusion occurred in the Toronto church, or, to be more specific, within the leadership of the Union of Evangelical Christians in Canada. Petro Kindrat, a Ukrainian Baptist activist and historian, who supervised the Benito church for a few years in the late 1920s and early 1930s, apparently, continued to be well aware of its current situation and that of the competing brotherhood of Evangelical Christians. He wrote that “when in the said Union [of Evangelical Christians] there appeared a misunderstanding (Ukr. neporozuminnia) in the leadership, it had a very negative effect upon the Benito community, which divided.”56 Former members of the church were seemingly reluctant to give too much detail regarding the precise nature of that “misunderstanding.” In brief, someone in the leadership of the Union was accused of having an extramarital affair, which provoked a split among the members, and since the accused denied the allegations, individual members took sides in the conflict based upon personal judgement.

A smaller part of the Benito church declared its support for the accused and split from the main congregation. The newly established community took the name of the First

55 The Church in the Valley, 45.
56 Petro Kindrat, Ukrains’kyi Baptysts’kyi Rukh u Kanadi (The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada) (Winnipeg, Toronto: Doroha Prawdy, 1972), 73.
Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians. Therefore, the split did not reveal any apparent theological or practical disagreement among the members. It was primarily a conflict of personalities and opinions within a close-knit group. On the contrary, Mennonites of the period were prone to constant fragmentation because of their differing “historical experience and diverse theological influences.” Yet, the fragmentation among Mennonites did not necessarily weaken the Mennonite community at large. Rather, as Frank Epp observed, it might in fact help to keep peace among different fractions of the movement, while individual members could find a Mennonite group to their liking.58 Some Benito members saw the issue as a sad misunderstanding within the same church rather than a division into two separate and independent bodies. This is how A. (who stayed with the majority group) viewed the division:

Interviewer: My understanding is that there were two Russian Evangelical churches here.

A.: No, you know, there was one church. I don’t agree that there were two churches... One member of the other church, (they built their own meeting hall), he told me: “We were fools (durachki), we did the wrong thing.”

Interviewer: They had fewer members, didn’t they?

A.: Oh yes, yes, they were a minority.59

59 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
The division greatly weakened the Slavic Evangelical community of Benito. But likewise it was indicative of the growing problems within the larger community of Evangelical Christians, first and foremost, problems of mismanagement and the declining authority of the leadership among the members. In fact, no other figure in the history of the worldwide church of the Slavic Evangelical Christians could match the charismatic authority that Ivan Prokhanov enjoyed. The new group, although they soon built a modest meeting hall in Benito, did not last too long. Later they sold the building to a Pentecostal or charismatic church group known as The Living Word Assembly based in the neighbouring town of Swan River, Manitoba, with partly Slavic membership.

At about the time of the division, the church still had a large number of young people, according to one of the informants, around 60 to 70. Apparently, many of them were Canadian born and completely bilingual. In fact, starting with late fifties, we already have a third generation in the church, the children of the children of the original pioneers. The English language was becoming native to an ever-increasing number of church members and their families. However, the continuous leadership, as represented by pastor Steven Roda (in office till 1975) and other key figures in the church, all belonged to the first generation. They maintained the use of the heritage language(s) in the church, but from early 1960s the language issue started to create tension between generations within the church community. Mike Gnida’s personal experiences were as follows (he was in his mid-twenties in that period):

Mike Gnida: I know that even after the church went to two [sic!], they had a new building, they put a new building… They had quite a few young people, and we
had a lot of young people. From 1962 to [19]65 we had sixty to seventy young people that used to come. We kept that [youth meetings] in English. We then said, “We should kind of start changing it [general worship] to English a little bit.” But they [church elders] said, no. We couldn’t get an agreement on that.60

Language, as Ted Regehr noted, was “an instrument of change” within the Mennonite community.61 He listed a few main reasons why some Mennonites clung to German. Among them there were: view of German as a barrier against external influences; a belief that the Mennonite faith and the German language were parts of the whole; a suspicion that a transition to English would affect the integrity of the Mennonite faith in a negative way; finally, many preachers did not speak English well enough, and, thus, feared to lose their position in churches. Not all of these reasons were equally relevant for the Slavic Evangelical movement. An author who signed as G.F. wrote to Evangel’skaia vera: “The language is the intellectual wealth [of a people], which we should not neglect but, rather, maintain it for the sake of our children.”62 It was necessary to preach the Gospel to other Slavic-speaking peoples. Yet, the language did not have any sacred significance for Evangelical Christians. Nor was it seen as a barrier between them and the outside world. Elsewhere in the same article G.F. said: “We live among an English-speaking people, and we must know that language.” The meaning of the language as an instrument of preaching to other Slavic-speaking peoples decreased in the post-war years. Much likely, the reluctance of the church leadership to implement English was due to a poor command of the language of some influential members. There

60 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
is no concrete evidence whether pastor Roda was fluent enough in English to preach and conduct church business in that language. However, given that he was born and raised outside Canada and did not receive any instruction in English, there is a strong probability that his command of the English language was not sufficient to preach in that language.

The first and the subsequent generations of church membership began to lose the common linguistic ground. However, this hardly was the main reason of the decline of the church. A shift in the use of the heritage language in a community does not necessarily lead to a weakening of the commitment or cohesion of the members. For as long as the religious worldview maintains its validity for the believers, the church community will continue to exist, while such issues as the language, in spite of its potential importance, are subject to negotiation within the community of believers.

As far as we can judge, the same linguistic misunderstanding plagued both branches of the split Benito church in early 1960s. Both proved unwilling to accommodate the demands of the younger generation within its membership to introduce the English language in worship. The language for Slavic Evangelicals was not a sacred object worthy of preservation and reverence per se. So what were the reasons for such reluctance on behalf of the church leadership to change the language policy? Apparently, the original messianic drive of the Evangelical Christians and their expectation that the new and complete Reformation would start in Russia or among the Slavic peoples may in part clarify this issue. When the hopes of Prokhanov and his followers to spiritually and socially transform Russia in the first quarter of the 20th century failed, Slavic Evangelicals abroad focused their attention on the work among the Slavic diaspora. Thus,
within this new paradigm, keeping the language was of great practical significance, for it served the purpose of maintaining the cohesion of the group. Apparently, by the 1960s it became apparent to a newer generation of the Evangelical Christians that the original prophetic aspirations of the Evangelical Christians had failed, and that maintaining the language “out of principle” did not make much sense.

Mr. Gnida, the deacon of the church in its last period, and a member of the youth group that tried to introduce English worship in the early 1960s, was perfectly capable of speaking in English, Ukrainian, or Russian, without any trouble. The younger generation viewed their church as just another Canadian Protestant church, in no significant way different from any like-minded English-speaking church around them. It was this that caused the rapid decline of the language. The new Reformation, spiritual regeneration of the old country, or the Slavic peoples in exile, was no longer an ongoing raison d’être of the Evangelical Christians. In spite of new initiatives (radio broadcasting, publications, religious education etc.), and an increasing standard of material well-being in its membership, the movement lost its zest and its special appeal. The relevant historical moment had passed, and the movement found itself devoid of one of its principal pillars, Slavic messianism coupled with belief in the imminent spiritual reformation. The language issue in the Benito congregation and in other churches of the Evangelical Christians in Canada and beyond was, in our opinion, indicative of profound crisis within the movement. Evangelskoe slovo contains convincing evidence that at least from the early 1960s Slavic Evangelical Christians regularly used English in formal worship. Not in all such cases the use of English may be explained by the presence of English-speaking guests.
It is interesting to compare the linguistic situation in the Benito church with another, very recent religious community in Manitoba also founded by people with Eastern European roots. This is the *Evangeliums-Christengemeinde* (The Community of Evangelical Christians) near the city of Steinbach, Manitoba. The church was founded by immigrants from Germany in late 1990s. However, only children and teenagers in the community were born in Germany. All adult members originally come from Kazakhstan and Russia, left for Germany as repatriants of German origin in late 1980s or 1990s, and acquired German citizenship. Practically all members are of “Russian German” (Mennonite and Swabian) origin, with some instances of intermarriage, and used to belong to the Evangelical-Baptist (a majority) or Mennonite (a small minority) churches in the countries of origin. Due to a variety of reasons, they chose to leave Germany, and relocated to Canada, taking advantage of the easy terms of the local Manitoba Provincial Nominee immigration program. All adult members are fluent in Russian. Many of them knew German (or, at least, some German) prior to their immigration to Germany. In any case, after years spent in the German-speaking environment, almost all of them became fluent in German. Children and teenagers usually speak German as their first language. Currently worship is conducted entirely in standard High German (with the exception of a special Russian meeting on Saturday night attended only by a handful of members). Younger members are also rapidly becoming proficient in English. However, in sharp contrast with the situation in Benito, plans are already being discussed by the church

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63 This wave of immigrants is briefly mentioned in Loewen’s “The Poetics of Peoplehood: Ethnicity and Religion among Canadian Mennonites,” *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 336. This author is not aware of any academic work specifically devoted to them.

64 In private conversations with the author the reasons cited by those Russian-German settlers varied anywhere from “the love for vast open spaces” and “longing for a real winter” to “the moral degradation of the German society” and “unfair treatment of immigrants in Germany.”
leadership to gradually introduce English into the worship. They do not see keeping a heritage language, be it German, Plattdeutsch, or Russian, as being worth any particular special effort. Members seem to be fairly happy in Canada, and do not feel much personal attachment to either Germany or the country of origin. It is likely that within a generation the church will be become an English-speaking conservative Christian church with minimal strife or discord.

**Conclusion**

The Benito church was far from the epicentre of war and the political turmoil in Europe, but the community felt their effects nevertheless. Newcomers who joined the church after the war, such as A., did not see much difference between various like-minded denominations, such as Evangelical Christians, Baptists, or Mennonites. For him the Benito community was the best fit because of its multi-ethnicity and multi-culturality, its acceptance of diversity, and accommodation to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of its members. A. was at the same time a Polish citizen, a short-term citizen of the USSR, a naturalized Canadian, an ethnic Belorussian, a speaker of a Russian dialect, a former Orthodox, a baker in Nazi Germany, a DP, an Ontario woodcutter, and a Manitoba farmer. The Benito church community reconciled all these bits and pieces of his life experience, and became his true spiritual haven and home. For the Benito church, due to the very basic tenets of its faith, successfully reconciled the diversity of life experience in its own unique way.

The second period in the life of the Benito congregation was certainly its apex, but at the same time there appeared clear signs of the imminent decline. Some of the
reasons for the decline are easy to explain from the vantage point of the overall shift in the demography and economics of the rural interior of the Prairie Provinces. Obviously, with rapid industrialization, increasingly comfortable urban living, and the growing significance of education in Canada, many young, mostly Canadian born and fully bilingual people from among Benito Evangelical Christians, left farms and villages for the cities. Some of the post-war newcomers, driven out of their native countries not by the peasant’s dream about land, but by atrocities of war and political considerations, likewise did not find farm life attractive or promising. The inevitable assimilation, acculturation, and a gradual loss of the heritage language also took their toll. Slavic Evangelicals, unlike the Doukhobors, or the Anabaptists, did not try to stop or hinder assimilation in spite of their attachment to their native tongue and traditions. Notably, there is no record of a conflict between the Slavic Evangelicals and any other neighbouring community or group. It is clear, though, that in the case of the Anabaptists, and, especially, Doukhobors, conflict with the government and/or the neighbours proved to be one of their major obstacles for the assimilation.

These are the reasons for the decline of the community, common for the population of the Canadian Prairies in general and immigrant experience in Canada in mid 20th century. However, there were specific developments within the larger religious community of Slavic Evangelical Christians worldwide that led to a decline of the movement, and, as a consequence, of its constituent communities, including the Benito church. Some of them were the death of charismatic Prokhanov in 1935, the devastating effect of the war on Slavic Evangelicals, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, and the growing feeling that the movement had not reached its ambitious goals of a large
scale new and complete Reformation. The forced merger of the Evangelical Christians with the rival Baptist church in the USSR in 1944 was an especially hard blow. In spite of the challenges, this was still the time of great hopes and a prophetic self-confidence.

Illustration 1. The Certificate of Achievement granted upon completion of the “Musical and Bible courses” of the Benito church. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Gnida.
Chapter VI. The Final Stage of the Life of the Church: Early 1960s until 1996

This sixth chapter covers the last period in the life of the Benito congregation of Evangelical Christians, that is, from the mid-1960s until 1996, when the church was officially disbanded, although the demolition of the church building took place in 2003. A handful of former members still live in Benito and vicinity. This period was marked by a decline in membership and activities and the aging of remaining members. The shrinking of the scope of activities of the Benito church generally corresponded to a similar process within the larger Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians both in Canada and elsewhere. Along with demographical patterns, common for many immigrant communities, such as the loss of heritage languages, assimilation, depopulation of rural Manitoba, and intermarriage, the overall decline of the movement contributed greatly to the fate of the Benito community.

It is necessary in particular to emphasize the fact that the decline of the Benito church in most of cases did not mean the decline in the religiosity or Christian commitment of its individual members. Members who moved away usually joined the churches they considered like-minded near their new places of residence. They could be Slavic and non-Slavic Protestant churches of different denominations. Likewise those former members, who remained in the Benito area, often became members of local English-speaking churches such as Baptist and Pentecostal communities.1 Along with the historical outline, this chapter will also analyze the demographic and social processes within the church, and point to the significance of the seventy years of its history for the religious and cultural chronicle of the Canadian West.

1 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
The framework for the discussion in this chapter is in part provided by the recent study by Royden Loewen devoted to the diasporic experiences of the “Russian” Mennonites in the Steinbach area of Manitoba and in Kansas in 1930-1980s. Obvious similarities between the Mennonites (especially the former group) and the Slavic Evangelicals allow for a valid comparison. Both streams of settlers came to Manitoba for a set of reasons where religion played an important role. They faced similar challenges, such as the fragmentation of rural life, assimilation, loss of the heritage language, and resisted similar pressures from inside and out. Their respective responses to this “great disjuncture” of their rural and religious cosmos, though, proved to be rather different.

Finally, this chapter will touch upon a fairly wide-spread opinion among traditionally non-Protestant immigrant ethnic groups (and reflected in some scholarship in the field) that belonging to a Protestant denomination as opposed to traditional Catholic and Orthodox churches by default signifies a lesser capability to retain a heritage language and a higher proneness to assimilation. Evidence gathered and observations made during this research cannot support this view. Identification with a mainstream Protestant church in Canada among traditionally non-Protestant immigrant ethnicities much more likely points to the fact that a thorough assimilation had already taken place rather than serves as a starting point of an accelerated assimilation. At the same time belonging to such immigrant Protestant community as Slavic Evangelical Christians, on

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2 Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside. Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

3 For instance, Oleh Wolowyna, “Linguistic-Cultural Assimilation and Changes in Religious Denominations of Ukrainian Canadians” in *The Ukrainian Religious Experience: Tradition and the Canadian Cultural Context*, David Goa, ed. (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989), 171-188. The same view is publicly stated by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress: “But since the Ukrainian Protestants showed a greater propensity towards assimilation, they did not play a prominent role in the cultural and political life of the Ukrainian community.” See the UCC website at [http://www.ucc.ca/cu_relations/community_profile.htm](http://www.ucc.ca/cu_relations/community_profile.htm) (URL valid as of 3rd of June, 2010).
the contrary, in practice meant a very high retention degree of a heritage language and a conscious effort to maintain one’s ethnic and cultural roots.

**Quiet Years**

The last period in the life of the Benito church received very little attention in *The Church in the Valley*, the historical booklet produced by members in 1985, when the congregation was on its way to complete disintegration. The historical booklet only noted that the church got over the division of the early 1960s and that its membership and communal activities rebounded. The youth group (apparently the one that attempted to introduce English into worship) was still very active in the 1960s. The youth group, however, sought interaction with “other churches’ youth groups in the area.”⁴ The latter, of course, were English-speaking, which pointed to a widening cleft between the older and the younger generation within the church community. This paralleled the developments within many Mennonite churches in Canada: “Churches that had boys’ and girls’ clubs tended to use English in gatherings long before it was accepted in Sunday morning worship.”⁵

Another accomplishment worthy of mention was the Benito church choir under the direction of Lydia Leskewich, a member of Belorussian origin. “The choir participated in several concerts, as well as travelling to many outlying towns and villages. One of its greatest undertakings was the trip to Calgary in 1964. During this time, the Benito choir was even instrumental in producing a record.”⁶ This is about the last

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⁴ *The Church in the Valley*, Lydia McKinnon, compiler (Winnipeg, 1985), 45.
⁶ *The Church in the Valley*, 45.
historical landmark of the Benito church, according to its “official” history. Nevertheless, the church existed for another thirty years following its success at the performance in Calgary in 1964. What characterised this period?

One can clearly discern two apparent tendencies that marked the life of the church during the last period of its existence. One of them is a demographic problem that combined such factors as the accelerating outflow of members, especially younger ones, from rural Benito to urban areas, the aging and natural dying out of remaining members, and a virtual halt of any new immigration from Eastern Europe. The other one is an overall steep decline of the movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians, which left no hope for a revitalization of the church’s life even if the demography were healthier. Leaders of the Canadian Evangelical Christians, Guk and Sidorchuk, wrote that “the older generation gradually started to die out, and the process is still going on. So the churches, once flourishing and packed with people of all ages including the youth, are now attended only by elderly members. One may think or suppose that the Evangelical Christians in Canada committed some error… Let historians resolve this issue, as it has been heatedly debated by the older generation.”

Mr. A. was inclined to attribute the sharp decline of the church to the division of the early 1960s, although the splinter group was the first to fall victim of the situation:

A.: Up to that split everything had been all right. While our church had been going on till I don’t remember which year, theirs [the splinter group] closed down

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soon. I don’t know for how long they lingered, but it hadn’t been around even for ten years. Maybe it was around for about 5 years.8

As earlier in the course of the interview, A. was very imprecise with all chronology outside his early war and post-war experience. Mr. Gnida (whose chronology was much more exact) pointed to 1985 as a year of the reconciliation between the groups, which, if factually true, means that the splinter group existed well over twenty-five years. In any case, A. tended to explain the fall of the church by the church division, while Mr. Gnida in an interview quoted earlier, seemingly leaned toward the language gap between generations (and rural depopulation, as we shall see below) as a probable explanation. Both explanations are subjectively true. Mr. Gnida was born and raised in Canada, and spoke in English with more ease and sophistication than in the heritage language. From his vantage point the language gap could be a major problem. Mr. A., on the contrary, was much less proficient in English, and the continued use of the heritage language did not represent any difficulty for him. At the same time, if the splinter group did in fact exist for as long as over twenty-five years (although Mr. A’s timing was different), this could affect the overall vitality of the church in a negative way.

The Benito congregation followed the common demographic pattern of rural communities across North America. The farms had to modernize their operations substantially, or else go out of business. Towns and cities, both nearby and far away, lured the rural folks with their high living standards and exceptional, compared to the rural environment, working and educational opportunities. Royden Loewen wrote about this process that swept across North America in postwar years, as “one of the largest

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8 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A., Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
migrations in the history of the continent."9 This shift, of course, required a thorough change in the cohesiveness of rural communities, especially, as Loewen pointed out, ethno-confessional ones.

But, along with undeniable similarities between the ethno-confessional communities of Manitoba Mennonites and Manitoba Slavic Evangelicals, the response of the latter to the challenges of modernity proved to be completely different. Royden Loewen singled out the three of the most frequent reactions of the Russian Mennonites to the assault of modernity: 1) successful adaptation to entrepreneurial modernization on the farms and certain modernization of values and lifestyle, 2) joining the ranks of the urban middle class where ethnicity survives only symbolically, and 3) migration to areas (Paraguay, Mexico and Belize) where they could practise the old ways without any substantial surrender to modernity.10

The pattern seems to be universal enough to be successfully applied to any rural ethno-confessional group in mid-twentieth century North America. It proved to be very enlightening when used to analyze the fate of the Benito church or the rural segment of the Slavic Evangelical community in Canada in general. Evidence shows that the Slavic Evangelical Christians residing in the countryside responded to the changing world more often in terms of option number two. As of 2009 there was probably only one former member of the Benito church (Mr. A.) who still farmed in the vicinity of Benito. His farm did not look too modern, but, in all probability, he was still able to make ends meet. The new generation of farmers had to switch to new farming methods. These methods, as it appears from the narratives of the informants, are impressive and, undoubtedly,

9 Loewen, Diaspora in the Countryside, ix.
10 Loewen, Diaspora in the Countryside, ix-x.
represented a major innovation compared to traditional farming. The efficiency of farming compared to traditional output rose more than ten times:

Mike Gnida: Farmers here, those who still work on land, they have, as I was told, sixty quarter sections, that is, about ten thousand acres, or five thousand hectares. Two brothers have three big combines, and while we harvested thirty acres per day, they harvest two or three quarters in one short day, that is, 320 acres.11

A few members farmed till relatively recently, but abandoned rural life for nearby towns (in one known case for an assisted living residence). But the vast majority of the Benito congregation members preferred joining the urban middle class. In many cases they joined an Evangelically-minded church, and, when it was possible, a Ukrainian church, for there are functioning Ukrainian Baptist or Evangelical-Baptist churches in all major cities of the West.12 However, the survival of an ethno-confessional entity in a modern urban environment is very problematic, especially when, as is the case with Slavic Evangelicals in Canada, there are no objective obstacles to its adaptation. Finally, the former members of the church, fully adapted to their new urban middle class role, were left only with token features of belonging to their original group, such as membership in a traditionally Ukrainian church, in a Ukrainian social club, having a network of friends who share the same background, or use of the heritage language at home.

11 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
12 For example, Alex Piatocha later became the pastor of the Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist church in Edmonton, The Church in the Valley, 60.
Migration elsewhere, including destinations abroad, and for declared religious reasons, also took place. Ironically, destinations chosen by some Benito members were in some sense the opposite of those of the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Mennonites. After 1945 about 2,500 Canadian Mennonites emigrated from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay alone. At least a few hundred more left for Belize, Bolivia, and other Latin American countries.\(^\text{13}\) Their respective underlying motivations might have been opposite as well. Loewen wrote that “the most conservative of the Mennonite farmers… who stood up to modernity”\(^\text{14}\) headed for Latin America after the war. Some of the Benito church members, by contrast, had decided to leave Manitoba for California, because, as they explained, they received God’s call to move there. Mike Gnida recalled that with a grain of sarcasm. He mentioned a few former Benito members who relocated to Sacramento, California, a large historical centre of the Slavic Evangelical immigration:\(^\text{15}\)

Mike Gnida: They have eleven hundred people [members of the church] who gather in that city. People go there, because the life is good there. We heard a brother saying, “God is calling me to go and serve in California.” And I thought to myself, “Why isn’t God calling anyone to come here? People live here, too.” No,


\(^{14}\) Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 169.

\(^{15}\) “When [Russian Evangelicals] decided to seek freedom from religious persecution in the closing years of the Soviet era, they already knew of Sacramento and that name acted as a magnet drawing them to the central California city of half a million people at the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Today, he says, the former Gold Rush city of the mid-19\(^{th}\) Century counts "two dozen" Russian-language churches as well as a Russian-language radio station. Such a presence in itself continues to draw immigrants, in these far less politically oppressive days, as other family members, relatives and friends join the crowd.” Source: “Russia: Ex-Soviet Immigrants Feel For Folks Back Home” by Bruce Kempel, broadcast via Radio Free Europe on September 10, 1998. The transcript is available online at [http://www.b-info.com/places/Bulgaria/news/98-09/sep10f.rfe](http://www.b-info.com/places/Bulgaria/news/98-09/sep10f.rfe).
it looks like God is calling everybody there. “God is calling me to be a pastor in California.” [He laughs].

Although the sarcasm, apparent in this narrative, is easy to understand, it is worth noting that, many former Benito church members lived all over Canada (our informant’s brother lived in Toronto), and did not inflict any judgement upon themselves. It was California that came to personify the dolce vita for our informant. On the other hand, the narrative reflected the frustration caused by the fact that Benito lost its status as a large and important church within the Slavic Evangelical movement. Evangel’skaia vera of the 1930s and early 1940s listed Benito among “main locations” worldwide, and the magazine frequently reported of pastoral visits to Benito and important events, which took place there. In the 1960s Benito was no longer a centre of the movement. Evangel’skoe slovo, the official periodical of the period, contained many references to pastoral and other official trips between Chicago and Los Angeles, or Chicago and Toronto, but Benito was hardly ever mentioned in this context. A 1962 issue described a pastoral trip of Ivan Chubai, pastor of the Los Angeles church of Evangelical Christians to Canada. Chubai visited individual believers and communities in Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg, but not in Benito.

Despite their comparable theology and lifestyle, Slavic Evangelicals, unlike conservative Mennonites, did not perceive urban life as a threat or a disadvantage. On the contrary, one of the reasons of the Mennonite migration from the areas of Canada, prone

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16 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
to urbanization, was the desire of the parents to see their children working on farms.\textsuperscript{18}

This is understandable considering the large urban membership of the Evangelical Christians from the very moment of their birth in the capital of the Russian Empire. Klibanov demonstrated the predominantly urban character of the Evangelical movement compared to other sectarian movements in the Russian Empire,\textsuperscript{19} while the Mennonite propensity to migration by their desire to preserve their “plain, communitarian, non-conformist, Christian lifestyle.”\textsuperscript{20} Applying these criteria to the Slavic Evangelicals, it is apparent that, in spite of a considerable theological kinship and historical connections with the Russian Mennonites, Evangelical Christians were neither plain, nor explicitly communitarian, nor non-conformist. Consequently, urbanization was not perceived as a threat, but rather, could well be seen as an advantage. For instance, being a member of an eleven-hundred-member strong Slavic church in a city with a gorgeous climate and ample work and educational opportunities was certainly preferable for many to staying in a declining church in snowy rural Manitoba.

It is obvious from the interview quoted above, that our informant did not see “God’s call” to move to California as a genuine reason. Clearly he considered it as a rather lame pretext, merely hiding more down-to-earth motives. While the motives that made Mennonites move to Belize or Paraguay were seen by some of their co-religionists staying in Canada as authentic, although, perhaps, too conservative or even imprudent, Slavic Evangelicals moving to the US were regarded almost as defectors.


\textsuperscript{20} Loewen, \textit{Diaspora in the Countryside}, 169.
The Last Good-Bye to the Benito Church: The Reunion of 1985

By 1985 the former church members and their descendants residing outside Benito far outnumbered the remaining local members. Yet, many of the former members felt a strong emotional link to their original church family, and attempted to maintain contact with it. In September, 1985 there took place the first and the only reunion of the Benito church. The booklet *The Church in the Valley* was produced and published on the occasion of the reunion. Remarkably, it was dedicated to “the few members who still diligently support this church and faithfully attend regular services.”\(^2\) The local newspaper *Swan Valley Star* also published a detailed report on the reunion authored by one of the church members (Illustration 3). The reunion was indeed an event of importance for such a small locality. The reunion lasted an entire weekend, and took place on the premises of the Benito Recreation Complex. A total of no less than 250 participants registered for the reunion, the vast majority of whom were visitors from outside the area, coming from “every province of Canada, from British Columbia to Ontario, and from as far south as California.”\(^2\) A number of guests, including pastors of Slavic Evangelical churches in Edmonton and Saskatoon, attended the event as well. A few musical groups, among them The Manna Singers, The New Life Gospel Singers, and The Ukrainian Gospel Singers of California performed at the reunion. Some of the performers were former members, or children of the former members of the Benito church. Both pastors, the first one, Luke (Luka) Naydiuk, and the acting pastor Steven Roda were present. The event was multilingual, as expected. The guest pastors addressed the audience in English and Ukrainian. The songs were sung in Russian and Ukrainian.

\(^{21}\) *The Church in the Valley*, 5.
The reunion culminated with the Sunday worship service, for the first time in a few decades attended by such a large crowd. There is no doubt that those in attendance had a very good time together, recalling past days, meeting old friends, and enjoying meals, music, and familiar landscape. However, everybody realized and tacitly agreed that the church was at the edge of extinction. In fact, for many the reunion was an once-in-a-lifetime experience, and there were no particular hopes or plans for the next one. The author of the newspaper report described her feelings in the following words: “Parting is never easy, especially since we know we might never meet again in this way; but we do have a hope of meeting some day at the feet of Jesus.” In spite of a cheerful tone, the reunion report read like a farewell speech to a church. The story was almost over.

Possibly the last action to revitalize the dying Benito community was a belated merger of the two parts of the community that split from each other in the early 1960s following the “confusion” within the leadership of the Evangelical Christian Union in Toronto. According to Mr. Gnida, the church division (and reconciliation) did not play a crucial part in the fate of the church. From his point of view, by 1985 the church was doomed no matter what:

Mike Gnida: After that [the reunion of 1985] those churches reunited. They said: “Let us be together again. As for that confusion, let us forget it.” But it was already a bit too late, the members had moved out for the most part.

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24 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
Evangelical Christians in Canada and Beyond: 1970s to 1980s

By late 1970s the worldwide movement of the Slavic Evangelical Christians had been reduced to a few relatively small and weak national unions. For historical reasons, discussed in earlier chapters, the vast majority of membership relocated to the New World in the post-war years. By the 1980s the vital churches remained only in the USA, Canada, and Argentina.

In 1976 the Union of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Argentina celebrated its 30th anniversary. At that time the nationwide brotherhood of the Slavic Evangelical Christians in Argentina was comprised of only eight local communities. The Union maintained formal and informal contacts with likeminded Unions in North America and considered itself a part of the larger Communion. A large European immigration arrived in Argentina (and, to an extent, Uruguay) from the mid-19th till mid-20th century, but later the country entered a lengthy and harsh period of economic recession and political turmoil, which largely curtailed immigration, and even forced some of the new settlers to move elsewhere. Many hundreds, if not thousands, of the Slavic Evangelical believers left Argentina for Canada and the USA in 1950s – 1980s. There were such members in the Benito congregation, as well. For instance, the family of Anna Deyneka (our informant Mike Gnida’s spouse) came from Argentina. A Pentecostal Bible school located in Swan River, Manitoba, still has an ongoing contact with Slavic Protestant communities in Argentina and Slavic (mostly Ukrainian) students from South America still come to Swan River to attend the Bible School.25 In all probability, there is a connection between this

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25 The Bible School referred to here is the Living Word Bible College, a Fundamentalist Christian school which declares its adherence to the “verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, the only infallible and authoritative written Word of God.” Its website is available at http://www.livingword.mb.ca/index.htm. The College catalogue contains numerous references to English as a Second Language classes for students and tuition
tradition and the Russian Bible Institute that was founded and existed in Benito in the early 1940s:

Mike Gnida: All I know is that there was a Bible Institute… before we came here. And we know there was a school here, and we know that maybe about 1943 my oldest brother Fred went to Toronto to go to that Bible school. So at about that time that they moved it there. And I think… the reason why they moved it there, was because Toronto was a bigger city, so it was better to have a Bible school there… But then it went to Toronto, and from there, from what we remember, it moved to South America, and that’s where it was, but for how long we don’t know. There is no school there now. I don’t think.

Interviewer: That Bible school, was it a Slavic or a Russian Bible Institute?

M.G.: Here? I think it was a Russian Bible Institute.

[The informant offered us a booklet about a Pentecostal Bible school in Swan River. It contained a photo of a number of current students with their respective names, most of which appeared to be Slavic].

Int.: I think there are some of the South American Russians on the photo, someone from Argentina.26

The informant returned to the same topic a bit later on during the interview:

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26 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
Mike Gnida: There is a Bible school there [referring to the Pentecostal Bible school in Swan River]. The students come from Ukraine, but it’s all done in English now. Everything is in English. The students have to learn the English language and then they study. It’s a small school, but they’ve had lots of ministers, lots of missionaries studied there. Lots. But now… they have sixteen students this year. I think the highest they have had is about forty.

Interviewer: Do they have people from Ukraine there now?
M.G.: They come there, yes. Ukrainians. Hold on, we have their catalogue here.
[Showing the catalogue]. Here are the students.
Int.: [Looking through the Bible School catalogue] But they are almost all Ukrainians!
Inf.: That’s right.
Int.: Even those who are from Argentina are actually Ukrainians.
Inf.: Yes.27

There were some newcomers from Argentina in Benito who later managed to move on to California. Some of them were the Karpiec family. One of the family members, Fedor (also known as Teodoro in Spanish, or Ted in English) Karpiec (1926-2004), had been the pastor of the First Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church in Sacramento, California.28 South American Slavic Evangelical believers seem to have started co-operating with the Baptists from early on, and although there is still a distinction as to which local church was settled by Evangelical, and which by Baptist settlers, they have

27 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
28 Based upon personal conversations of the present author with Rev. Theodore Karpiec in the early 1990s.
historically maintained common institutions, such as Bible schools and radio broadcasting. It is necessary to note that the roots and motives of early Evangelical settlers in South America were essentially the same as of those who came to Canada. The author had an opportunity to interview the pastor of the Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church in the city of Paysandú, Uruguay. Ivan Sidorchuk (no relation to Ignatii Sidorchuk of Toronto), readily agreed to an interview, which took place in his house, located next to the church building. A man in his 70s, born in Volhynia, he spoke excellent standard Russian. When asked how and when he learned the language so well, Mr. Sidorchuk explained that he had attended a Bible Institute in the city of Rosario, Argentina, in the 1950s, where the instruction was in Russian. His story combined the traits of a personal and a collective mode of narrative, and covered his personal experiences and, at times, the history and current situation of Slavic Protestant churches in Uruguay and Argentina. This piece of the interview is a part of Sidorchuk’s family legend, and, strictly speaking, is a piece of “history-telling,” that is, reconstruction of the past.29

Ivan Sidorchuk: We left Ukraine in 1937. Poland was ruling that territory, Volhynia, so we left for Argentina. Due to the economic situation we were looking for a place to go. I attended the Slavic Biblical Institute [in the city of Rosario, Argentina] for two years, the one that exists till this day… My father took part in the war with Japan in 1905 [Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05], in the war with Germany in 1914 [World War I], and when rumours appeared in 1936

that there would be another war, father took us kids and left for Argentina. So we came here, and did not have any intention to go back, because he had sold everything he had there.\textsuperscript{30}

It appears from the story that the motivation for migration was complex, and included such factors as economic hardships and the overall feeling of insecurity reigning in Europe in the 1930s. Both Slavic Evangelical Christians and Slavic Baptists were not as numerous and not as financially secure as many of their co-religionists in North America. This produced a stronger feeling of closeness between members of these respective Unions and motivated them to co-ordinate their efforts and, in many cases, merge locally. Besides, Argentina and Uruguay did not have that influx of immigrants from Galicia (the Austro-Hungarian, later Polish lands with mostly Catholic Ukrainian population) that prevailed in Canada. Nor did South America have such a large wave of politicized post-war Ukrainian migrants that was particularly instrumental in alienating the Ukrainian and Russian communities from each other in the USA and Canada. Many Ukrainian Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Argentina and Uruguay came from Volhynia, and were former Orthodox or had an Orthodox ancestry.

Interviewer.: Have you ever had a situation, as it sometimes happens in Canada, when Ukrainians are reluctant, or Russians are reluctant to communicate with each other, and tend to form separate churches? Have you ever had any problems of this sort?

I.S.: We are thankful to God that we have had none of this problem in Uruguay.

\textsuperscript{30} Sergey Petrov. Interview with Ivan Sidorchuk, Paysandú, Uruguay, May 7, 2008.
Int.: Do you have more Ukrainians or Russians here?

I.S.: [The informant thought the question referred to all Slavic immigrants to Uruguay in general, irrespective of their church membership] We can say, at this point, that the proportion is about fifty-fifty. Because those old believers as we called them or Lubkovites that came to San Javier, they were Russians proper.31 While the new [wave of] immigration took place when we came, they arrived mostly from Ukraine.32

The relative percentage of those with Ukrainian roots within the Slavic Evangelical and Baptist community (that is, among newer immigrants of the 1930s and 40s) was much higher than that of Russians or other Slavic ethnic groups. Elsewhere in the course of the interview the informant indicated that his church and other like-minded churches in Uruguay were home for all Slavic ethnicities, including some members of Polish and Czech background. He repeatedly referred to the language these churches used for worship as “the Slavic language” (slavianskii iazyk).33 Obviously, there is no such language strictly speaking, and the informant had in mind the mutual intelligibility of the

31 The informant referred to the Russian sect of New Israel, a sectarian movement that emerged in the Voronezh province of Russia in 1880s. The movement was somewhat akin to the Doukhobors both in terms of its theology (an emphasis on direct revelation, rejection of the Bible, non-ritualism) and in terms of its internal structure (a highly charismatic, almost divine figure of the leader). A large group of New Israelites emigrated from Russia to Uruguay in 1913 and founded the town of San Javier. For more on the movement see Sergey V. Petrov “Novyi Izrail”: transformatia vetvi russkogo religioznogo raznomsyliia” (New Israel: Transformation of a Branch of Russian Religious Dissent), Religiovedenie 2 (June 2006): 40-58, and a recent PhD dissertation by Nicolas L. Guigou, “Religião e produção do outro: mitologias, memórias e narrativas na construção identitária das correntes imigratórias russas no Uruguai” (Religion and Construction of the Other: Mythologies, Memories and Narratives in the Identity Construction of Russian Immigration Currents to Uruguay) (PhD. diss., Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2008). The full text of the former article is available online (in Russian, with the summary in English) at http://www.amursu.ru/religio/issues/2-2006.djvu. The full text of the latter work is available online (in Portuguese, with a summary in English) at http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/14948/000672663.pdf.
East Slavic languages, which allowed using Ukrainian or Russian (or Belorussian) for sermons and singing since virtually all gathered could understand what was being said or sung in any of those languages. The church where Sidorchuk was the pastor bore the name *Iglesia Evangelica Bautista Eslava* (Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church).

The USA branch of the movement, with the headquarters of the honorary chairman in Chicago, fared not much better than their South American brethren. The Union continued to hold regular annual conferences; from the early 1970s they were hosted intermittently by the two strongest communities, in Chicago and in Los Angeles. Other communities of the Union were reduced to a semi-lethargic existence. In 1974, however, a new prayer house in Los Angeles was consecrated, and in 1976 representatives of the US branch went on a pastoral trip to Argentina. The 50th Conference of 1979 in Los Angeles was attended by only 17 participants, including guests.34

In 1980 the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists held its 42nd annual session in Moscow. The Conference was attended by 24 delegates from abroad, most of who represented Baptist and Evangelical churches of the Eastern Bloc. Seven North American guests included Ivan (John) Sergey (d. 2006), of Chicago, USA, the honorary chairman of what was left of the Prokhanovite Union, and Ivan Kalinkovich Guk, a “servant of God’s church,” a leader of Evangelical Christians from Toronto, Canada.35

34 Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 346-47.
35 “Sorok vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd evangeli’eskikh khristian-baptistov” (The 42nd All-Union Conference of Evangelical Christian-Baptists), 1, 2 *Bratskii Vestnik* (1980). This issue of the official magazine of the AUCECB is available online at [http://mbchurch.ru/brotherly-journal/1433-q-q-1-2-1980](http://mbchurch.ru/brotherly-journal/1433-q-q-1-2-1980).
Slavic Evangelical Christians in North America, faithful to Prokhanov’s loyalty to earthly authorities and abstention from taking sides in politics, were able to maintain contacts with like-minded believers in the USSR throughout the Cold War era. Ivan Guk was particularly instrumental in keeping the link between the Prokhanovite church and the Soviet believers alive. In 1962 a delegation of the AUCECB visited Canada by the invitation of the Baptist Federation of Canada. Along with meetings with Canadian Baptists in Brantford, Ottawa, and Toronto, the delegates from the USSR visited a number of Slavic Baptist individual believers and worship groups in Ontario, and “attended worship at the prayer home of Evangelical Christians under the leadership of brothers Guk and Sidorchuk. The gathering was small, but the faithful welcomed us very heartily and in the spirit of love.”

Ivan Guk visited his native Belorussia and had contact with Evangelical churches there as early as the 1960s, when getting a permit to visit the USSR, especially for an “émigré,” could represent a significant task. Aleksandr Firisiuk, a prominent leader of the Evangelical-Baptist movement in Belorussia, chairman of the Belorussian church of the ECB in 1994-2002, recalled Ivan Guk visiting churches in the 1960s. Belorussian Baptists complained to Guk about the lack of spiritual literature, saying that they had nothing but their Bibles. To this Guk replied that they should be thankful to God for having nothing but the Bibles, for there would come a time when people in Belorussia would have abundant Christian literature, but would stay away from God as was

36 “Poezdka delegatsii VSEKhB v Kanadu” (A Trip of a AUCECB Delegation to Canada), Bratskii Vestnik 1 (1962). This issue of the official magazine of the AUCECB is available online at http://www.mbchurch.ru/brotherly-journal/854-qp-y-s1-1962.
happening in Canada. This anecdotal story sounds like Ivan Guk was not inclined to take risks smuggling Christian literature into the USSR as some foreign believers did, and preferred to counterbalance his Belorussian brethren’s plea with a prophetic maxim. This might have been due to the long-standing political non-partisan approach of the Evangelical Christians, but also could be a reflection of Slavic Evangelical Christians’ general sceptical attitude towards Western style evangelism and external freedoms that did not necessarily lead to spiritual fruit.

As of 1980 the Canadian branch of the Evangelical Christians had twelve communities in the entire country and, likely, less than one thousand active believers. The church maintained brotherly contacts with like-minded unions in the USA and Argentina, and with the Moscow-based AUCECB. As of now, communities in Toronto and Edmonton seem to survive, while those located in smaller towns and in rural areas (Castlegar, BC, Benito, Kuroki, SK, and others) closed down.

Benito Evangelical Christians and Other Ukrainian Canadians: Assimilation and Language Retention

The great majority of Benito Slavic Evangelicals at any given time were ethnic Ukrainians. In this they followed the ethnic pattern of Slavic Evangelicals in Canada. Of all Canadian Slavic Evangelical communities, only the church in Castlegar, British Columbia, was predominantly Russian in its ethnic composition. This is due to the fact

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39 Based on a personal communication of the author with a former member of the community in Castlegar. This was the only local church of Evangelical Christians in Canada with a Russian pastor, Eli (Ilya) Vetrov (1924-1978). Shenderovskii, *Evangelical Christians*, 330-31.
that Castlegar has been one of the centres of the Doukhobor resettlement in Canada since the 20th century, and the Russian Doukhobors or their descendants still comprise a large percentage of the town’s population.

It would be useful to compare the findings that were made in Benito with existing work on different religiously defined groups of Canadian Ukrainians. Unfortunately, virtually the entire corpus of academic work on Canadian Ukrainians deals almost exclusively with Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate) and Orthodox Ukrainians. Indeed, Ukrainians not belonging to either of the mentioned large religious groups, particularly Protestants, could be regarded as not “sufficiently Ukrainian” by champions of Ukrainian nationalism. However, an interesting statistical review authored by Oleh Wolowyna, provided a different perspective. According to this study, of an estimated number of slightly over 580,000 Ukrainians in Canada according to the 1981 Census, members of major Protestant groups (United Church of Canada, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglicans) comprised 19%, plus an additional 4.5% of members of so called “fundamentalist” groups (Mennonite, Hutterite, Pentecostal and other minor fundamentalist denominations).40 It is not very likely, based on available data, that Canadian Ukrainians who belong to the United Church of Canada or the Lutheran Church do so because of their personal religious convictions. Apparently, such a large percentage of Ukrainian Protestants may be satisfactorily explained only by a high rate of intermarriage among Canadian Ukrainians.41 As a result, the whole family may choose to identify with the denomination of the Protestant spouse or parent, possibly, because it is

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41 “Proportions of ethnic exogamy were found to be highest for the oldest immigrant groups such as Ukrainians and Germans,” as quoted from Madeline A. Kalbach, “Ethnic Intermarriage in Canada,” Canadian Ethnic Studies 36 (2002): 25–39.
perceived as more Canadian or mainstream as compared to the strictly ethnic Uniate, Ukrainian Orthodox, or Slavic Evangelical church. The percentage of Baptists among Canadian Ukrainians is easy to explain, since Ukrainian Baptist churches have existed in Canada for about a hundred years, and Baptists are known for their inclination to proselytizing. We find it very doubtful that there is any significant number of Ukrainian Mennonites or Hutterites. It is not clear which group, according to the researcher, Evangelical Christians belong to. The methodology of distinction between “major” and “fundamentalist” Protestant groups looks somewhat confusing. For example, Mennonites and Hutterites, albeit often conservative, hardly fall into the category of fundamentalists in the commonly used sense of the word, whereas many Baptists could be classified as fundamentalist. But in any case, it appears that about 23.5%, that is, almost one quarter of all Canadian Ukrainians, were Protestants as of the 1980s.

According to Wolowyna, the highest rate of the Ukrainian language retention is observed among the Orthodox, closely followed by Ukrainian Catholics. “On the average a Ukrainian Catholic is seven times more likely to speak Ukrainian than is a member of one of the major Protestant denominations,” who have the lowest rate of language retention. This appears to be a broad generalization based upon statistics without taking into account circumstances of manifold and diverse groups of Protestants of Ukrainian origin and is not supported by the evidence gathered during this research. Unfortunately, taken at its face value, this statistics only reinforces the view of Protestant Ukrainians (and Russians) as people alienated from their national roots and prone to rapid assimilation. Wolowyna never specified the percentage or the relative share of different

denominations within the larger Protestant group, although this may be of crucial importance.\textsuperscript{43}

In practice, and the example of the Benito church testifies to it, ethnic Protestant churches have an extraordinarily high rate of heritage language retention. For as long as the Benito congregation existed, that is for about seventy years, the level of language retention among its membership was practically 100%. Indeed, Protestants must be well-versed in the language of worship, since it consists primarily of preaching and singing, and involves active participation of congregants, or else their participation in it becomes rather meaningless.

Benito and other rural Slavic Protestants had the disadvantage of living far from established centres of Ukrainian (or Russian) cultural and community life, such as Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, or Winnipeg. As of 1980 six out of twelve (and all but one in the Prairies) existing Slavic Evangelical communities in Canada were located in rural areas.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, given the circumstances of negative demographic processes and virtual lack of educational opportunities in the native tongue, the heritage language retention among Slavic Evangelicals fared well, reaching into the third generation of settlers. There is certainly no evidence that the Protestant religious affiliation of the Benito evangelicals \textit{per se} triggered an accelerated assimilation or caused a rapid decline of the heritage tongue. On the contrary, the Evangelical church community served as a powerful medium of language retention. Again, this situation may be altogether different

\textsuperscript{43} As was already mentioned, Ukrainian Lutherans or Ukrainian Anglicans in all probability exist mainly due to intermarriage, for there is no evidence of a mass conversion of Ukrainian Canadians to these denominations.

\textsuperscript{44} See Shenderovskii, Evangelical Christians, 330-31.
from that among Canadians of Ukrainian origin that chose to identify with an “English”
church, be it Presbyterian, United, or Anglican.

“The Third Wave”: Post-Soviet Protestant Immigration and Evangelical Christians

The shift in Soviet politics under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev in the late
1980s allowed for free emigration from the country once again after about sixty years of
heavy restrictions. Many Evangelical believers from the former Soviet Union took the
opportunity to emigrate, many, if not most of them, Ukrainians. Catherine Wanner called
the process “the instability emigration.” Indeed, as discrimination or the lack of
religious freedoms was no longer a primary reason for the emigration following
perestroika and the demise of the USSR, a desire to improve one’s living standards and
escape from the turbulent transitional period to the new form of government and the
market economy became the main driving force behind the mass Protestant emigration of
the late 1980s and 1990s. According to Wanner, a total of approximately half a million
Soviet or ex-Soviet (for the USSR ceased to exist on December 31, 1991) Evangelicals
left for the West.

During the last decades, in contrast to the first half of the century, Canada in
general, and the Canadian West in particular, was not the primary destination for those
migrants, but the USA. The number of people worldwide preferring to move to Canada
significantly increased, and a procedure of merit-based selection became a necessity. By
that time Canada had adopted fairly straightforward immigration policies that required a

prospective immigrant to meet a number of criteria, including age, education, experience

45 Wanner, Communities of the Converted. Ukrainians and Global Evangelism (Ithaca and London: Cornell
University Press, 2007), 100.
46 Wanner, Communities of the Converted, 101.
and the knowledge of English or French. Most Soviet Evangelicals would not meet these criteria. Canada, of course, continued to accept refugees “who fear persecution or whose removal from Canada would subject them to a danger of torture, a risk to their life or a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.” However, the last wave of Evangelical immigrants from ex-USSR would not in most cases qualify under this provision, because persecution largely ceased in the last years of the Soviet period. Consequently, virtually all members of this late wave of immigration ended up in the USA. Wanner noticed that the US approach to accepting religious refugees from the “Communist” countries was highly politicised (certainly more so than in Canada). As part of these Cold War style policies, prospective refugees from the USSR did not even have to establish or prove a fear of persecution; they merely were required to be members of what US lawmakers viewed as a “persecuted group.” Thus, the entire Evangelical-Baptist and Pentecostal population of the USSR was eligible for refugee status in the USA automatically.

As a result, Slavic Evangelical churches in Canada did not benefit from the potential wave of religious immigrants from Eastern Europe, and lost, perhaps, their last chance to improve demography and revitalize dying churches, even in urban areas. Religiously motivated Evangelical settlers did reach Manitoba eventually by the end of the 1990s, but currently most of them 1) are non-Slavic, since members of most such churches are USSR-born Germans who came to Canada after a lengthy (often over ten years) sojourn in Germany, and 2) prefer to settle close to Winnipeg, especially in and

49 Wanner, Communities of the Converted, 97-98.
around the city of Steinbach, thus replicating the area of resettlement of Russian-German Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s and 1920s. But this is a different chapter in the history of religious immigration to Manitoba.

A notice of the revocation of registration of charities at their own request published in the Canada Gazette as of October 21st, 2000 included “Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical Christian Church, Benito, Manitoba, business number 119130052RR0001.” The revocation came into effect as of the date of publication.50

“The Abomination of the Desolation Standing in the Holy Place”

When the church was disbanded, the question arose as to what to do with the building. The building was deteriorating due to disuse, and the remnants of the former Benito community, of course, hated to see this happen. The first preference for the former members was to try to preserve the use of the building as a place of worship. They offered it free of charge to a number of religious communities and interested individuals in the area, but to no avail. Many of the members saw the deteriorating of the church building as a shame, and described that situation using the biblical metaphor of “the abomination of the desolation standing in the holy place.” (Mt.: 24:15) Mike Gnida was far more emotional speaking about the demolition of the church than earlier during the conversation.

Mike Gnida: We had people looking at it, like the church N. goes to [the informant referred to our common acquaintance from Swan River, a member of

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the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, also known as the Holdeman Mennonites]. They looked at it for a long time. We thought they’d take it… They looked at it, and they said, no, we can’t take it. Then we had other people. We had the Bible Camps looking at it… A Native man, his name was Fred Evans, he asked for a church building, but they said it’s too large to move, you know, you had to cut wires, and all that. Who else? And there were some private people who’d looked at it, but nobody wanted to take it. So then we made a decision that it’s deteriorating badly, we noted that… the siding was bad, it needed painting, and the cement [foundation] wasn’t good… there was a big crack there. And then we told many of our former members that if they wanted the building to stand, we had to collect money to maintain it. And as nobody was ready to do so, we decided… and we prayed a lot so that God would help us to do the right thing… And then we decided that since nobody takes it and nobody wants to help to repair it – it [would] cost fifty to seventy thousand dollars to get it into good shape and nobody agreed, then we decided, the rest of the members, that we had to take it down, so we took it down.51

The demolition took place in 2003. The style of Mike Gnida’s narrative about three years later revealed the pain it cost the former members to make this hard decision. His emphasis on all the measures the church took to prevent the demolition and the sudden laconism of the finale bear witness of this. It clearly felt like pronouncing the words we took it down still hurt, even a few years after this had been done.

51 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
The demolition of the Benito church building that was a true decoration of the otherwise fairly dull village signified the irrevocable end of the community. At this point only a small handful of people who used to be members continue to live in the village or in its vicinity. The Benito congregation and its gorgeous building, constructed thanks to the enthusiasm, effort and sacrifice of the members, shared the fate common to many rural churches of all denominations across Western Canada (see illustration 2). They are all unique in their own way, just as the biographies of the people who built and constructed them are unique. But most of those other churches, Orthodox and Catholic, Lutheran, Doukhobor, or Anglican, have their chroniclers. The denominations they were part of are still active, and, frequently, are concerned with the preservation of their history and heritage. The movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada, on the contrary, has largely passed into oblivion. As church buildings deteriorate or get demolished, surviving or former members pass away, their grandchildren’s connection with the heritage of their ancestors is often limited to the appreciation of borsht or pierogi and a few old family anecdotes.

Conclusion

The third period in the story of the Benito church (and, by and large, of the Slavic Evangelical movement) came to its predictable end toward the end of the 20th century. The community ceased to be demographically sustainable from the mid or late 1960s. The constant migration to cities and zero immigration undermined its demographic health. However, it had ceased to be spiritually sustainable even prior to that time. As soon as it

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52 See, for example, Barry Glen Ferguson, *The Anglican Church and the World of Western Canada 1820-1970* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1991); Margaret Ellis Thompson, *The Baptist Story in Western Canada* (Calgary: Baptist Union of Western Canada, 1974).
became apparent that the declared and aspired goals of the movement could not but fail, the church and the movement it was a part of, were doomed.

Slavic Evangelicals showed a response pattern when challenged with the fragmentation of the familiar rural and ethnic world that differs in some important aspects from that demonstrated by Canadian Mennonites. While Mennonites, depending on their religious and lifestyle preferences, responded divergently, with “a number of [them] recommit[ting] themselves to a religiously informed anti-modernism by migrating to isolated settings,” second and third-generation of Slavic Evangelicals overwhelmingly chose “a diversity of urban lives.” This, inevitably, led to a speedy process of further assimilation and the decline of the heritage languages within the movement as a whole.

The decline of the Slavic Evangelical movement was evident everywhere; however, it took especially acute forms and was most accelerated in rural areas, since urbanization hit their demographic pool stronger and earlier than the communities in larger cities. For example, small communities in Chicago and Toronto are still functioning. Most rural communities, such as the ones in Benito or Kuroki, Saskatchewan, ceased to exist. The period of decline produced a few widespread responses to that challenge among the Slavic Evangelicals. One of them was a rapprochement with the Slavic Baptist movement, numerically much stronger, and with better ties to Western churches, which allowed for a degree of support and assistance. In some cases (e.g. South America) the rapprochement led to a virtual merger of Slavic Evangelical and Baptist churches, thus replicating the merger that had occurred in 1944 in the USSR. Another response, particularly in Canada, was a migration of believers,

53 Loewen, Diaspora in the Countryside, 3.
54 See, for instance the website of the Toronto Russian-Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians at http://www.blagovestie.org/index.html (Link valid as of March 7, 2010).
rather acculturated and, often, native speakers of English, to English-speaking Protestant churches. This happened to many former members of the Benito congregation, both those who migrated elsewhere and those who stayed in the village and the area. Migration in order to join existing traditional centres of Slavic Protestant immigration also took place, California being one of the most popular destinations. For objective reasons, Canada did not become a major recipient of the migration of Protestants from the ex-USSR following its collapse, and Canadian Slavic churches did not benefit from what could have been a potential chance to improve their demography.

By the Benito reunion of 1985 and the subsequent publication of the memorial booklet *The Church in the Valley*, the last big event in the life of the church, the vast majority of those with a Benito church connection, resided outside the village. It was quite clear to all gathered that the church would be closed down soon. The community was officially disbanded in 1996, and most remaining members started attending English-speaking churches in the area. In spite of some hectic and rather hopeless actions to save at least the church building, the surviving members chose to tear it down. Thus, the church’s history was over. There is a temptation to say that the movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians ceased to exist shortly thereafter. However, the present conditions of religious freedom in Russia, Ukraine, and most of the ex-USSR led to a rebirth of churches of Evangelical Christians, separate from the Evangelical-Baptist Union, and, in April, 2009, to a restoration of the All-Russian Commonwealth of Evangelical Christians (*Vserossiiskoe Sodruzhestvo Evangelskikh Khristian*) that now claims to be the legitimate heir of the Prokhanovite church and its traditions.\(^{55}\) The restored

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Commonwealth, apparently, cannot boast a direct continuity of the Prokhanovite lineage. The leader of the new Union is a former controversial Baptist leader, publisher, and successful businessman Aleksandr T. Semchenko. It is also far from being certain that the resurrection of the Evangelical Union in Russia will contribute to an awakening among Evangelical Christians outside Russia, including Canada. Of course, there is no way to resurrect the Benito church. However, only time will determine the future of the Evangelical movement in Russia and elsewhere and indicate whether it has any potential left for the present and coming generations of believers.

The history of the Benito church is an example of grass-roots multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism in action long before these ideas became a dominant discourse in Canadian society. The church emerged, re-affirmed its identity, and succeeded as a common church home for all like-minded people of Slavic descent in spite of many pressures. These pressures came as the result of the economic difficulties of recession years, and the intentional influence of Ukrainian Baptist church in Canada with its narrow ethnic focus. The Benito church, comprised from the very beginning of settlers of Ukrainian descent, proved to be equally attractive for Belorussian immigrants, and for Russian Doukhobors, whose attitudes ranged from the overall willingness to help the Evangelical newcomers to sporadic conversion to Gospel Christianity.

Furthermore, Slavic Evangelicals, as represented by the Benito community along with sister churches throughout Canada, are an important stream of immigration that helped to colour the ethnic and religious palette of the country, and contributed to its economic development, especially in the Canadian West. Let us not forget that Slavic

the resurrected movement of Evangelical Christians in post-Communist Russia see also Tat’iana Nikol’skaia, Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast’ v 1905-1991 godakh (Russian Protestantism and State Power 1905-1991) (Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel’stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta, 2009), 303.
Evangelicals came to Manitoba at the time when earlier settlers, of English, Scandinavian, or Russian Doukhobor origin, were moving out of the Manitoba countryside due to recession and in search of urban opportunities. Thus, Slavic Evangelicals revitalized areas of rural Manitoba, satisfying their desire for land and their craving for religious and civil freedom. Their cohesion, community-mindedness, shared motivation and goals, permit them to be classified as a distinct stream of religious settlers in Canada, particularly visible and important in the Prairies. The significance of the Benito church, and the Slavic Evangelical immigration in general, for Canada can be summarized by saying that the Slavic Evangelical immigration, through its work and its hopes, its fulfilled and failed dreams, its stubbornness in spite of difficulties, and its flexibility and openness to the new, helped make Canada what it is now.
Illustration 1. The Benito church in 2003, a few months prior to its demolition. Courtesy of Mr. Vladislav Petrusevich.
Illustration 2. Abandoned rural Ukrainian church built in 1921 near Dauphin, Manitoba
Illustration 3. Article in *Swan Valley Star* about the Benito church reunion of 1985.

Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Gnida.
Chapter VII. Slavic Evangelical Christians in the Context of the Canadian Religious Landscape

Although an immigrant group, and a small minority by national, provincial, or even local standards, Slavic Evangelical Christians were nevertheless an integral part of that colourful palette that made up the story of Christianity in Canada. More specifically, they were a group, along with such other groups as the French Catholics, German Lutherans, Anglicans, Mennonites, Russian Doukhobors, to name just a few, which endeavoured, as Benjamin Smillie suggested, to find or built their own New Jerusalem on vast Canadian Prairies endowed with the characteristics of not “an earthly, but a heavenly destination.”¹

The present chapter will seek to correctly place the Benito church of Evangelical Christians and the movement in general within the Canadian religious kaleidoscope. To be precise, evangelicalism appears to be the stream of the Canadian Protestantism the Benito church rightfully belongs. It is particularly useful to consider the developments within the movement of the Slavic Evangelicals in the light of chronologically and geographically parallel developments within Canadian evangelicalism. These developments included demographic change, the Bible school movement, a tendency toward transdenominationalism and blurring of denominational boundaries, and modern ways of the evangelization work and mission, such as radio broadcasting and large-scale continuous missions, among others. In spite of their modest numbers, rural character, and

a degree of an ethnic seclusion and separateness, Slavic Evangelicals did not stay aloof from these major trends of the Canadian Protestant experience of the 20th century.

This chapter will also examine the motivations of the immigration of Slavic Evangelicals in Canada and tests them against the idea of New Jerusalem, suggested by Benjamin Smillie and Anthony Rasporich. According to it, utopian or millennial impulse was often behind religious communities making home in the Prairies. The development of the Slavic Evangelical Christians in the Prairies is impossible to explain satisfactorily without taking into account ideological factors, with a sanctification of religiously motivated wandering for Christ’s sake, and a millennial component.

Another important aspect of such an experience is the complex relationship between religion and ethnicity. Slavic Evangelical Christians had obvious traits of both a religious and an ethnic group. Boundaries between the religious and the ethnic sphere were often blurred or intertwined. In the words of Bramadat and Seljak, “[c]hurch’s centrality in this particular ethnic community, and – equally important – the ethnic community’s centrality in the life of the church, [is] quite common.” In the case of the Benito community, when the movement at large collapsed as a specific religious project, the ethnic self-designation of the Benito community, namely its constructed “Slavic,” or “Russian-Ukrainian” identity, disintegrated as well. Following the demise of the church, instead of a once pervasive “Slavic Evangelical” identity, we find Canadians with Russian, Ukrainian, or Belorussian roots. Recent comparative studies of the religion and

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3 Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, “Charting the New Terrain: Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada” in Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada, Paul Bramadat, and David Seljak, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 4.
ethnicity interaction within the Canadian Christian context demonstrated that this is often a normal course of events, since “ethnic identity is fluid; its core elements change over time,” influenced by political, social, and religious factors. A comparative analysis of the Benito church versus comparable experiences of such ethnic religious immigrants as Mennonites and Doukhobors will be useful. All three groups faced identical challenges of the economic stagnation, post-war displacement and resettlement, rapid urbanization, assimilation, and the decline of traditional farming. All groups gradually drifted away from the condition when they “had readily distinguishable occupational, residential, linguistic, religious, and attitudinal characteristics.” Both groups had to cope with the internal fragmentation, the loss of the heritage languages and needed to address the issue of an allegiance to the historical homeland. Yet, the Mennonite, Doukhobor and Slavic Evangelical experiences in Canada unfolded along different paths in the long run, the first two often successfully re-grouping as either decidedly traditionalist rural communities, or middle-class liberal urban ones, and the latter largely passing into oblivion as a cohesive movement. While Ted Regehr persuasively demonstrated that most Canadian Mennonites accommodated to the dominant society as a result of their transformative experience, the Slavic Evangelical movement fell victim of assimilation when the movement failed to attain its envisioned goals.

The story of the Benito church, and Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada in general, should be regarded as a case study of yet another instance of “the actualization of

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4 Bramadat and Seljak “Charting the New Terrain: Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada”, 23.
6 Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 4.
religious ideas through religious movements. Ideas, with all due respect to material factors, often bear pre-eminence in the realm of the spiritual. The Benito church remained alive as a separate religious entity as long as the idea that nurtured it remained sustainable.

Slavic Evangelical Christians and Evangelicalism: Definitions

A broad definition of evangelicalism, devoid of any references to a political, geographical, or cultural context suggested by David Bebbington enjoys a wide recognition, if not consensus, among Canadian scholars of evangelicalism. This definition considers four characteristics to which evangelicals, in spite of their denominational and other differences, agree upon. They are a) conversionism, b) activism, c) biblicism, and d) crucicentrism. It had been recently used by Bruce Guenther in his discussion of the Mennonites, Bryan Hillis in regard to Canadian Lutherans, and Robert Burkinshaw in his work on transdenominational evangelical milieu of British Columbia.

Slavic Evangelicals, both in and outside Canada, had a few very distinct characteristics distinguishing them from other theologically and practically similar movements. Among them one could name the prophetic focus of their movement, the marked importance of charismatic leadership for part of their history, a decidedly non-denominational character with little regard to theological subtleties, and a bond of tradition linking them with old Russian dissenter movements. Nonetheless, this does not

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preclude the possibility to apply to them the four characteristics of evangelicalism suggested by Bebbington.

Indeed, Slavic Evangelical Christians put a special stress on a personal experience of conversion and “regeneration,” thus admitting to full church membership and the ritual of baptism only those who had testified to such an experience. Chapter VII of the Confession of Faith of Evangelical Christians, an official statement of belief, prepared by Ivan Prokhanov, says: “A man acquires salvation through faith, repentance, conversion, and the birth from above.” This approach was manifest in the practice of the Benito church. Alex Gnida, a former member of the church, recalled: “As for Benito church, I will never forget the precious memories when a lady came to me and asked me if I would like to be saved and I said ‘yes’ and since then Jesus has been helping me.”

Evangelical activism is the desire to put the faith into action, which “generally followed the conversion experience.” In spite of their ethnic character and small numbers, their participation in evangelizing and mission activities was invariably high, and included at various times mission at home and abroad, radio broadcasting, and charitable undertakings. In spite of its rather secluded geographical location, rurality, relatively modest membership numbers, and ethnic character, the Benito church followed all major trends of Canadian evangelicalism. At some point in history the community was the seat of a Bible school, and some of its fold, such as Iakov Kozlov (Koziol) became famous and respected radio evangelists. These activities will be discussed below, in the section on Bible schools, Christian broadcasting, and mission.

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10 Quoted from Liudvig Shenderovskii, Evangel’skie Khristiane. Vozrozhdennoe evangel’skoe dvizhenie v istoricheskoi khristianskoi tserkvi (Evangelical Christians. The Re-born Evangelical Movement within the Historical Christian Church) (Toronto: Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians, 1980), 472.
12 Burkinshaw, Pilgrims in Lotus Land, 9.
Their doctrine and practice were based upon the Bible, and, in general, did not significantly deviate from those of most other evangelical churches. The biblicism of Slavic Evangelical Christians was all the more accentuated that it was rooted in the rejection of the ritualistic worship and the tradition-based doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox church, which often cost dissenters dearly in terms of pressure and persecutions. The Confession of Faith of Evangelical Christians refers to the Bible in the following words: “The Holy Scripture, along with the internal revelation, which is in accordance with the Scripture, is the only true guide in the work of salvation, and there is no other.”

Finally, Slavic Evangelicals’ understanding of Christianity was revolving around the sacrifice of Christ and its saving power. The atoning death of Christ on the cross was regarded as the only path to salvation, while good deeds, the saving role of the church and priesthood, and ritualism characteristic of Eastern and Catholic churches were denied importance. It will suffice to mention such hymns, familiar to English-speaking evangelicals, and included into the trilingual (Russian, Ukrainian, and English) hymnbook of Evangelical Christians as “Jesus, Keep Me near the Cross,” or “My Brother, to Calvary Come” to illustrate the point. The Confession of Faith follows the Arminian principles of free will and redemption of all: “Redemption, accomplished by Christ, is sufficient for the entire human race. It is the only way to salvation, and there is no other.” Thus, the Benito church as a part of a broader Slavic Evangelical movement met all requirements of the quadruple definition suggested by Bebbington, and did not differ

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in any significant way from other Canadian movements commonly understood as evangelical ones.

However, Bebbington’s definition may look exceedingly theoretical and devoid of a concrete historical context. To be on a safe side, it is useful to employ yet another definition of evangelicalism as a phenomenon, rooted in very specific historical circumstances, and suggested by John Stackhouse. According to Stackhouse, “evangelicals are those Christian groups that trace their heritage back to the North Atlantic revivals of the eighteenth century and who have not since departed from the affirmations characteristic of these revivals.” Of course, the historical link between the North American revivals and the Evangelical movement of 1870-s in Russia is rather indirect. Although initially planted by an English-speaking preacher, the movement of Evangelical Christians in Slavic lands had soon acquired distinct traits bearing witness to its political, ethnic, and cultural milieu. Yet, Heier pointed to the connection between Lord Radstock, the apostle of the Russian revival, and “Wesley and his successors in early Methodism,” and the historical connection, although circumstantial, did exist. The extension of the Stackhouse’s definition, though, fully embraces such movements as Slavic Evangelicals, whose link to 18th century revivals in North America otherwise looks less than obvious: “or they [evangelicals] are groups that since that time have formed links of fellowship with the original evangelical groups and have taken on their distinctive affirmations.” Stackhouse went on to include into the evangelical fold also individuals who share evangelical ideals regardless of their denominational affiliation,

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but here we intend to analyse the role and place of Slavic Evangelicals as a group within Canadian evangelicalism. Stackhouse’s historical definition reminds of Michael Gauvreau’s remark on some of persistent trends within evangelicalism, rooted in the experience of the Great Awakenings. Gauvreau wrote: “The stirring of the impulse for reform among Christian clergymen and believers, the peculiar sense of messianic nationalism…, and the articulation of the republican political tradition itself have been traced to the concepts of time and history preached in the Protestant churches during the evangelical Awakening.” As earlier chapters demonstrated, all of these aspects, including a belief in the imminent renewed Reformation of which Slavic Evangelicals are the seed, elements of Slavic messianism, and even the involvement of the Prokhanov and his followers in Russian politics as representatives of the liberal and democratic wing, brief as it was, were remarkably characteristic of the Slavic Evangelical movement. Thus, they establish a tangible link between this branch of eastern European religious dissent born in the second half of the 19th century in Saint Petersburg, and the spiritual flames of North American revivalism.

Religious Situation in the Canadian West Prior to the Arrival of Slavic Evangelical Christians

The Canadian West became the epicentre of the religious immigration to Canada from the late 19th century, due to the extraordinary attraction of the area to agricultural settlers. Foreign-born settlers were of crucial importance for the economical and cultural development of the region. Not surprisingly, the attraction, selection, and accommodation

of immigrants have been some of the central issues in Canadian politics in the west from early on.\(^\text{19}\)

French Catholics and Mennonites became a part of the religious mosaic of the Prairies from as early as 1818 (founding of the St. Boniface Catholic church and mission in Red River)\(^\text{20}\) and 1870s (immigration of the Mennonites from Russia) respectively. Nevertheless, Anglo-Canadian Protestants dominated the political and educational spheres from the very time when those territories were open for colonization. Advocates of British and Protestant Canada envisioned her as the country where the English language, mainstream Protestantism, and British lifestyle and the system of values would always prevail. At the same time, the task of colonizing the West made it necessary to rely heavily upon the influx of settlers of non-British ethnicity and non-Protestant religion. Along with Mennonites, whose religion was generally perceived as a form of Protestantism, or Lutheran Scandinavians or Germans, such “exotic” groups as Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Ukrainians, and Russian Doukhobors took part in populating the Prairies.

Although Manitoba became a part of the Confederation in 1870 with the Catholic majority, political attitudes on the Prairies were characterised by the hegemony of the mainstream Protestantism. It is notable that even Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s, highly valued German-speaking settlers, were regarded by Anglo-Canadian Baptists as

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“fallen away or gone-astray Baptists” in need of evangelization. Canadian Methodists likewise considered Mennonite immigrants an object of their missionary concern.\textsuperscript{21}

Immigrants of Slavic or Southern European descent often met with even higher degree of prejudice and misunderstanding. Their religious practices were viewed as much inferior to those of the British Protestant population. Consequently, proselytizing among those immigrants became a priority among leading Anglo-Canadian Protestant leaders of the period. “English speaking philanthropists such as A. Hunter and J.S. Woodsworth… hoped to lead the [Ukrainian] immigrants (by means of their social and religious agencies) to understanding and adhering to British-Canadian ideal and to Protestantism.”\textsuperscript{22}

The Benito Church and the New Jerusalem

Benjamin Smillie argued that ideology and idealistic considerations shaped the motivation of many religious settlers to the Prairies.\textsuperscript{23} He regarded the vision of a just, peaceful, and prosperous society, embodied in the prophetic biblical image of the New Jerusalem as a moving force behind their decision and their efforts. This communal effort had, on one hand, religious character, and, on the other hand, ethnic character.\textsuperscript{24} The metaphor of the New Jerusalem, in Smillie’s opinion, has four main aspects: a political reality, a heavenly city, a centre of worship, and a gift from God.\textsuperscript{25} Anthony Rasporich also pointed out the millenarian element in the way the first white settlers in the Prairies

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{23} Steven M. Stobbe, “Introduction to Visions of the New Jerusalem, 1.
\bibitem{24} Steven M. Stobbe, “Introduction to Visions of the New Jerusalem, 2.
\bibitem{25} Steven M. Stobbe, “Introduction to Visions of the New Jerusalem, 3.
\end{thebibliography}
were viewing their experiences. The Benito community seems to be a missing chain of the story of the pursuit of New Jerusalem on the Canadian Prairies. It is important to evaluate to what extent the Benito church fits this picture. It is easy to agree that ideology and non-materialistic factors played a crucial role in the life of the Benito church. The present thesis argues, among other things, that such factors were considerably more instrumental in the demise of the church than the surface developments such as the rural depopulation, assimilation, or the lack of new Slavic Evangelical immigration.

Anthony Rasporich stressed the distinction between utopia, which, as he claimed, ceased to exist “after the advent of progressivism,” and religious millennialism, which still continues as a vital idea. Nonetheless, utopian imagery is clearly discernible within Prokhanov’s thinking of a Christian city of God. The large-scale Christian communal project contemplated by Ivan Prokhanov in mid-1920s, when Soviet authorities were still relatively benevolent towards Christian collective enterprises, was nothing else than a religious utopia in its classical form. Inhabitants of the City of Gospel were to work collectively, providing each other with living standards without material need or excessive luxury, their houses, painted in light colours, were to be surrounded by fruit gardens, and an artificial sun were to provide light to the settlement during the night. The project never came to any concrete realization, and it is unclear to what extent the City of Gospel aroused enthusiasm among masses of Evangelical Christians. However,

27 Rasporich, “Utopia, Sect and Millennium in Western Canada 1870-1940,” 214.
this example illustrates the historical presence of utopian perspective in the Slavic Protestantism, and serves as an introduction to a further discussion.

In two biographies of early (first years of the 20th century) Slavic Protestant settlers on the Prairies, Feoktist Dunaenko and Ivan Shakotko, two themes permeate their post-migration experience in Canada. Firstly, they were thrilled with newly discovered sense of freedom and, secondly, they felt the higher purpose in having to journey so far from the native country. They were not actively and consciously pursuing New Jerusalem as a concrete political state or physical territory. Unlike, for instance, Mormons on their trek to Nauvoo, Illinois, or Utah, they had no ultimate goal expressed in geographical terms. Rather, their wandering from their native land and their overall migratory experience remind of another biblical metaphor, also invoked by Smillie in the context as New Jerusalem as a heavenly city: “For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.” (Hebrews 13:14, NIV).29 Testimonies of Dunaenko and Shakotko will be discussed in detail later. At this point, however, it is important to emphasize that these two basic themes were likewise common for the Benito church and the Slavic Evangelical experience on the Prairies. As evidence, Smillie referred to Salem Bland, who taught at Winnipeg Wesley College, one of the most important and successful Bible schools in the Prairies. Bland wrote: “But the Slav [apparently, he referred mostly to Ukrainians] instinctively believes in a Holy City, and only needs to be told where it is to be found.”30

Further, these themes had clear parallels with the fourfold definition of the New Jerusalem offered by Smillie. Largely apolitical as they were, Benito members readily

29 Smillie, Introduction to Visions of the New Jerusalem, 7
30 Quoted from Introduction to Visions of the New Jerusalem, 6.
acknowledged the condition of political and religious freedom and democracy which
contrasted with the situation back home. They often perceived the opportunity to make
home on the Prairies as a tangible gift from God. The religious freedom and an
opportunity to worship God their way without government restraints and hidden or
explicit discrimination transformed their new Prairie home into a place of worship. Serge
(Serhii) Bychkowski, a former Benito member of the post-war wave, and a former DP,
wrote: “We sincerely thank God for this country, for its freedom, its honest democratic
government, and especially for the Benito church.”31 There is little doubt many of them
saw their new circumstances in the Canadian West as a model of political system, or,
more precisely, as a godly political system. Ivan Chubai, the leader of the Los Angeles
community of Slavic Evangelical Christians, who came to California after many years in
South America, in a report published in Evangel’skoe slovo described his impression of
Canada and the city of Winnipeg in the following words: “In the streets there were many
Slavs. Shops were full of goods. Overall, Canada made a positive impression on me, as a
good democratic country with a good order. Canada’s people enjoy all rights and
conveniences (udobstva). Unlimited freedom for all denominations.”32 Characteristically,
Canada appears here as a place endowed with truly millennial qualities: beauty, freedom,
order, prosperity. Remarkably, “many Slavs” were part of this scene!

At the same time to regard the choice of the Benito community and some other
Slavic Evangelical communities to settle in the Prairies as a strictly religious act of
millennial nature would be a stretch too far. There were other sides to it, which should be
equally taken into consideration. First Benito settlers came to Canada as a small segment

31 The Church in the Valley, 67.
of a larger Ukrainian immigration from eastern Polish territories. Ukrainians in interwar Poland were subject to ethnic discrimination, in addition to the fact that eastern Poland was a least urbanized part of the country. Farmland resources in Poland were very limited, which resulted in elevated prices out of reach for many poorer peasants. Immigration, especially to Canada, had been a traditional response to this difficulty. Interviews with former Benito members reveal the dream to acquire land as one of the primary considerations for the migrants: “My dad bought land quite quick, because his mother said: ‘When you come to Canada, buy land right away!’ And so my father did.”

Royden Loewen’s recent study of Russian Mennonite migrants of the 1870s, and, supposedly, the seekers of the New Jerusalem in the Prairies, looked into economic motivations their migration. Loewen demonstrated that the custom of partible and bilateral (covering both daughters and sons, and including a surviving spouse) inheritance contributed greatly to the Mennonite decision to immigrate to Canada and the USA in the 1870s. “While religious faith undergirded the Mennonites’ distinctive pioneer communities, so, too, did economic strategies. And, of the economic strategies, those pertaining to inheritance were especially important.”

33 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
34 Royden Loewen, Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 34.
By contrast, an example of prevailing chiliastic motivation of a Mennonite migration would be the trek of millennially minded Mennonites led by Klaas Epp, Jr. in 1880 from their colonies in European Russia to Russian Central Asia (present-day Uzbekistan).

This observation does not contradict the millennial New Jerusalem impulse as an important factor behind religious migrations to the Prairies. Rather, it underlines how multifaceted the migration experience really was. Slavic Evangelicals in Canada, especially those who immigrated as adults or survived DP camps, treasured as a gift from God the freedom and opportunities they found in Canada. Furthermore, they saw Canadian political system as a godly one, and compatible with Christian ideals. Hence, the political Canadian state was endowed, in a way, with attributes of a biblical city of God. At the same time, economic considerations, the desire to join family members, and other less idealistic reasons played their role in their decision to immigrate. This bifurcation did not create any split personality complex, nor was it unique to Slavic Evangelical immigrants. Ultimately all immigrants to the Prairies were guided by pursuit of happiness the way they understood it, although some chose to express this pursuit primarily in religious terms.

The Benito Church and the Canadian Evangelical Mainstream

The Russian-Ukrainian church of Evangelical Christians in Benito emerged in the late 1920s, when the worst of prejudice against Eastern European immigrants had been already over. By that time Ukrainians became an established community with a rich
network of educational and religious infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Benito church was in an advantageous position compared to non-Protestant immigrant religious denominations in that it was not viewed as an “exotic” group. While Eastern Christians at the initial stage of their sojourn in Canada were “perceived… to be in dire need of Christianization and civilization (the two were thought to be concomitant),” Slavic Evangelical Christians soon found their place within the mosaic of Canadian evangelicalism.

The Benito church, in spite of being a small rural religious community of recent immigrants, frequently replicated or responded to the developments one could observe in the Canadian evangelical mainstream. The phenomenon of Bible schools in the 1930-40s, modern forms of evangelism such as Christian radio broadcasting, and both home and foreign mission are among these developments. Besides, both the Benito church and the Canadian evangelicalism at large followed such trends as the rise of non-denominationalism and transdenominationalism and a peak of membership and activities of evangelical churches in the 1940s and 1950s.

Although predominantly Ukrainian by ethnic origin, the Benito church was not fully a part of the Ukrainian Canadian world due to its religious marginality in relation to the rest of Ukrainian Canadians, and due to its decidedly non-exclusive, multiethnic, “Slavic” character. At the same time, as an evangelical church, the Benito members were a full-fledged part of the world of the Canadian evangelicalism, for, as Guenther pointed out, “immigrant-based denominations represent an important strand within the larger Canadian evangelical Protestant tapestry.”

37 Myroslaw Tataryn, “Canada’s Eastern Christians” in Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada, 313.
The Bible School Movement

The sudden mushrooming of evangelical Bible schools, colleges, and institutes took place in much of Canada and especially in all three Prairie Provinces from mid-1920s as a response to educational needs of the Canadian evangelical community. Those institutions tended to be “revivalistic in temperament, stressing personal religion, evangelism, and missions.” Along with an obvious focus on training evangelical pastors, ministers, and missionaries, those institutions pursued a goal of elevating a general biblical literacy of evangelical believers. The first school of this wave was, apparently, the Bible training institute founded in Calgary in 1921 and later relocated to Winnipeg. Other such schools opened their doors in Winnipeg, Three Hills and Lethbridge in Alberta, Two Rivers, Briercrest, Moose Jaw, and Norquay, Saskatchewan, to name just a few. Many of these schools were rather short-lived, while others survived and exist until now. Those institutions were founded by a wide spectrum of denominations, such as Church of Christ (Disciples of Christ), Church of the Nazarene, Church of God, and others. A number of them of them were established by Mennonites.

Bruce Guenther suggested that the Mennonite participation in the Bible school movement and proliferation of Mennonite Bible schools and colleges was indicative of Mennonites coming to terms with the mainstream Canadian evangelicalism.

Participation in the largely transdenominational Bible school movement tacitly led to a more substantial involvement of the Mennonites in domestic and foreign missionary

41 Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 233.
projects, contrary to the widespread Mennonite reluctance to proselytize among non-Mennonites or non-Germans.\textsuperscript{43} Besides, the goal of an open mission contributed to the widening use of English among the Mennonites. This is especially true of the Mennonite Brethren Church, but the phenomenon is not limited to this, perhaps the most evangelical of Mennonite groups. More conservative Mennonite factions criticised, sometimes fiercely, their evangelically-minded brethren, for they regarded employing evangelical, mainstream, English practices as contrary to the Anabaptist teaching. Therefore, the involvement with the Bible school movement in Canada was in itself a marker of integration into the world of Canadian evangelicalism.

Slavic Evangelical Christians fit the pattern outlined by Guenther. The Bible school of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Benito was founded when Bible schools proliferated across the Prairies. It operated from some time in 1930s until 1943 at which time it was moved to Toronto, where, according to Ted Regehr’s list of Bible schools, it closed down in 1946.\textsuperscript{44} Interestingly, Regehr listed the Russian Bible Institute in Toronto among Canadian Mennonite Bible schools. The endnote to this surprising entry provided additional information: “The Russian Bible school was not really Mennonite sponsored. H.H. Janzen, an MB [Mennonite Brethren] leader in Ontario, was invited to be principal by Peter Deyneka of the Russian Gospel Association in Philadelphia and with the active support of Oswald J. Smith’s People’s church in Toronto.”\textsuperscript{45}

Thus, Russian Mennonites, once instrumental in the evangelical revival in the Ukraine of the second half of the 19th century and in the formation of Stundism, maintained a degree of interest in the Slavic Evangelical movement in the new country.

\textsuperscript{43} Guenther, “Living with the Virus,” 321-32.
\textsuperscript{44} Regehr, \textit{Mennonites in Canada}, 235.
\textsuperscript{45} Regehr, \textit{Mennonites in Canada}, 497, endnote 79.
We can only speculate why Peter Deyneka, a Slavic Evangelical leader, author, and educator of Belorussian origin, asked Henry Janzen, who previously worked for a Mennonite mission in Africa, to serve as a principal. The latter’s possible knowledge of the Russian or Ukrainian language might have been taken into account. What this example illustrates clearly, though, is the essentially non-denominational character of the Slavic Evangelical movement. Born as a non-denominational revivalist group in 1870s, it remained true to its original stance, equally open to a co-operation with Baptists and Mennonites, Disciples of Christ or the decidedly inter-denominational People’s Church in Toronto.

Just as in the case of Mennonites, involvement of Slavic Evangelicals with such large transdenominational projects of the Canadian evangelical mainstream as the Bible school movement, was a marker of their integration into the mainstream. Inadvertently, the integration in its turn served also as a contributing factor to the decline of the movement of Slavic Evangelicals. Coupled with the loss of a particular and separate vision for their movement, a high level of integration was gradually making the separate existence of Slavic Evangelicals less and less relevant.

Radio Broadcasting, Home and Foreign Mission

Home and international mission and such modern types of proselytising as radio- and televangelism were some of prominent aspect of the evangelical movement in

46 Peter Deyneka Sr. (1899-1987), the founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, immigrated to the USA with his parents in 1914. SGA website is located at http://www.sga.org/ (URL accessed on August 3rd, 2010).

47 Oswald Smith (1889-1996) attended a Presbyterian seminary and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1918. However, the People’s Church he founded in Toronto in 1928 has a markedly inter-denominational character. Their official website states: “The Peoples Church is an interdenominational church. Our people come from a variety of denominational backgrounds.” (http://www.thepeopleschurch.ca/ms-faqs.asp, URL accessed on August 3rd, 2010).
Canada in the latter half of the 20th century. Oswald Smith was one of the first Canadian evangelical leaders who actively employed radio to preach Gospel. According to Kevin Kee, “those who tuned in to Oswald Smith’s radio program knew that… they were on the cutting edge. Their God, after all, could be preached through the newest of inventions.”

Mennonites did not stay aloof from this new type of outreach in spite of the fact that primarily radio was regarded by the Mennonites as “an instrument of worldly entertainment.” The first Mennonite radio in Canada appeared in 1940, and by 1952 Mennonites aired nine programs in western Canada alone.

Radio broadcasting was instrumental, and, in some cases, crucial, for the evangelical expansion in the 1930s and 1940s. For instance, the Evangelical Free Church quadrupled its membership in western Canada between 1938 and 1945 “capitalising on evangelistic radio broadcasting.” In fact, most evangelical churches, groups, and many individual preachers, such as Baptist preacher and politician William “Bible Bill” Aberhart, reached out to their audience through radio broadcasting. Among evangelical groups, which pioneered Christian broadcasting in Canada we find Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Not unlike the Evangelical Free Church, the Alliance’s growth in 1930s and 1940s was attributed to a high degree to a skilful use of the new medium. The real significance of radio broadcasting for the growth and consolidation of evangelicals in

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Canada, as well as its influence on non-evangelical audiences has not been yet a subject
of a consistent scholarly analysis, and is still awaiting its researcher.53

Ivan Prokhanov, an engineer by profession, immediately noticed the opportunities
brought about by radio. Symptomatically, the brief world news section of the
Evangel’skaia vera magazine in the early 1930s (that is, even before the movement began
radio ministry) was called “The Gospel Radio.” The Benito church became involved in
the radio ministry at about the same time, following this general tendency among
Canadian evangelicals. This ministry was described in one of the previous chapters.54
Fascination of some of the second-generation Benito members, such as Iakov Koziol
(Kozlov), led them to take up a full-time employment as missionaries.55 John (Ivan) Huk,
the Evangelical Christian leader from Toronto, was involved in another radio
broadcasting project, managed by the Toronto Christian Mission.56

The Evangelical Word (Evangel’skoe slovo) magazine, the official periodical of
the World Fellowship of the Slavic Evangelical Christians headquartered in Chicago,
often published letters to the editor from all over the world, expressing thanks for the
Christian radio broadcasting. Surprisingly, in spite of the Iron Curtain restrictions, many
such letters came from the Soviet Union (rendered as “Russia” in the publication), but
also from France. Stepan Karpovich Androsiuk from Russia wrote: “Listening by the

54 Anna Gnida, a former member of the church, recalled the effect of the Christian radio broadcasts: “I can
also remember seeing my father with tears in his eyes as he heard the Gospel proclaimed. Realizing that
they weren’t getting the spiritual food that they needed…, my parents began looking for a church that
preached the same message as they had heard on the radio program. After attending a number of churches,
in 1952, they began to regularly attend the Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical church in Benito.” Quoted from
The Church in the Valley, Lydia McKinnon, ed. (Winnipeg, 1985), 43
55 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006.
56 “In the early days of our history, when communism maintained a strong grip on this part of Europe, radio
was our main tool for evangelistic outreach. It was during this time that John K. Huk (1907-1987), a
Russian preacher, began this work.” Quoted from Global Missionary Ministries Inc. website at
http://www.gmmeuro.org/about.htm (URL accessed on August 6, 2010).
radio to the Word of God, which flows out of your lips, we thank the Lord for his mercy that we can listen to the Gospel from far-away lands.” Viktor Aleksandrovich Il’iashevitich, also from Russia, wrote that he and other Christians had bought radio sets only to be able to listen to Evangelical programs, while Mikhail D. Novatskii from France just thanked for the radio programs he always listened to.57

Both domestic and foreign mission is an inalienable part of the life of most evangelical churches. This inclination to the mission work naturally flows out of the concept of conversionism, which is one of the basic general characteristics of evangelicalism at large. Obviously, evangelical mission in Canada dates back to a time much prior to the founding of the Benito church. Consequently, the Benito congregation had an advantage of joining existing missionary projects and follow proven missionary strategies. Missionary efforts of the Benito church in the post-war period often involved close co-operation (through monetary contributions) with larger English-speaking or Mennonite mission projects. Some of them were the Sudan Interior Mission,58 Pan American Mission, Canadian Bible Society, and notably, Deyneka’s Slavic Gospel Association in the USA,59 which illustrates their continuing concern for the propagation of Gospel in Slavic lands.

In spite of a heavy involvement of Canadian (and, apparently, American) Slavic Evangelical Christians with large transdenominational mission project, Slavic Evangelicals elsewhere were more focussed upon the work among other Slavs. A letter to

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58 SIM (Sudan Interior Mission, now renamed Serving in Mission) is an old-standing and large scale interdenominational mission project aiming at evangelizing the population of sub-Saharan Africa. The Mission was founded by Canadians Walter Gowans, Roland Bingham, and American Thomas Kent in 1893. Their official website is located at http://www.sim.org/index.php/ (URL accessed on August 5, 2010).
59 The Church in the Valley, 44.
the editor of *Evangel’skoe Slovo* from a Uruguayan Slavic Evangelical Christian S. Khil’chuk complained about a “stony soil” for the spiritual work, and that the preaching among Uruguayan Slavs is especially difficult.60 This reminds of a tendency among some, even evangelically-minded, Mennonites to extend mission efforts in the first place to “scattered Mennonites and other German-speaking people.”61

Thus, the pattern of activities the Benito church was engaged did not differ much from that of most other evangelical churches of Canada. The Benito community, in line with the traditional non-denominational ethos of Slavic Evangelical Christians, regarded itself as an integral part of a larger evangelical community, on a local, national, and international level. It participated willingly in the projects started or promoted by mainstream English-speaking evangelical or evangelically-minded Mennonite churches. The Benito church also employed the modern evangelization methods as they were becoming available simultaneously with all other Canadian evangelicals.

The phenomenon of the People’s Church in Toronto *per se* indicated a notable trend within the mid-20th century Canadian evangelicalism, the rapid growth of non-denominational evangelical churches.62 This trend happened to be in tune with the long-standing position of Slavic Evangelical Christians, and inadvertently contributed to the blurring of boundaries between them and other Canadian evangelicals, especially to the rapprochement with Baptists, and to the general diffusion of Slavic evangelicals into the Canadian society. Of course, Slavic Evangelicals were not unique in this respect. This process of a mutual convergence involved many Mennonites, many of whom now “began

to see evangelicals of other denominations as kindred spirits. Consequently, they began to participate significantly in transdenominational ventures."  

**Demographic Changes**

In terms of the overall peak of the evangelical activities, scholars of Canadian evangelical religion coincide that “the later 1940s and 1950s looked like a glorious time for Canadian Protestantism.” This “glorious time” was manifest in the overall church membership growth, record high Sunday schools enrolment, mushrooming of specialised church groups, such as women’s, men’s and children’s, and various church-sponsored mission, charitable, and educational projects. This was equally “glorious time” for the Benito church and Slavic Evangelical Christians. According to the accounts of former members, “during the 1950’s the church was at its peak.” At that point in time the range of church activities included, in addition to those mentioned above, a children’s group, a youth group, a women’s meeting, a semi-professional choir, and a training course for choir members. In other words, the Benito church had the same, if not better, infrastructure as most other Canadian rural evangelical churches.

Notably, such aspects of church infrastructure as specialized clubs and meetings, and even a choir indicated that the Benito church employed strategies characteristic of mainstream evangelical churches. For instance, the gradual alignment of Mennonites with

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65 *The Church in the Valley*, 43.
66 Sergey Petrov. Interview with Anna and Mike Gnida, Durban, Manitoba, December 6, 2006; Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009; *The Church in the Valley*, 17, 43-45.
the evangelical mainstream, and their drifting away from old-style practices, was usually accompanied by emergence of youth groups and dedicated church choirs.67

This pattern of parallel development in regards to demography between Canadian Evangelicals in general and Slavic Evangelicals would be broken only later. “Old” established mainstream Protestant churches, such as Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists in the post-war period entered a stage of a sharp decline both in terms of church attendance (if not nominal membership) and in terms of influence on public life.68 At the same time, “evangelical Protestants have, since 1960s, transformed Protestant demographics by forging one of the most robust religious movements in Canada.”69 Even though many rural evangelical communities shrank or ceased to exist altogether, this mainly means that members relocated to urban areas in tune with the nationwide process of urbanization. In its turn, the Benito church, and other churches of Slavic Evangelical Christians, entered the stage of a severe crisis. While the Canadian evangelicals consolidated and assured an “increased visibility within the Canadian society”70 for their movement, Slavic Evangelicals melted down and became almost obsolete by the beginning of the 21st century.

The Benito Church as an Ethnic Community

What clearly sets the Benito church, along with other Slavic Evangelicals in the diaspora, apart from most Canadian evangelicals, is their ethnic character. Ethnic within the Canadian contexts, in the words of Bramadat and Seljak, most frequently means those

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67 Guenther, “Living with the Virus,” 236.
70 Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada,” 367.
outside the category of “Canadians of British or French descent.”\textsuperscript{71} In itself, ethnic evangelicalism is nothing new or unique for the Canadian religious landscape. According to Bruce Guenther, a high degree of strength and the numerical growth of the Canadian evangelicalism have come from immigrant, or “ethnic” evangelicals as one of its main sources.\textsuperscript{72}

The history of ethnic evangelicalism in western Canada has a long history. The Benito church was certainly not among the first or the largest evangelical churches in western Canada. “By the mid-1930s the population of the four western provinces numbered just over 3 million, with only half of the population indicating that they were of the British origin… Some of the immigrants have been influenced in other places by evangelical Protestant ideas and emphases that were reflected in the denominations they established in Canada.”\textsuperscript{73} Clearly, the Benito church and Slavic Evangelicals in general were representatives of such immigrant groups. As it was established in previous chapters, most original members of the Benito church who came to the area in the late 1920s and early 1930s, had been members of the Union of Evangelical Christians in the old country prior to their arrival. This prompted the Benito church to join a larger ethnic denomination of the same persuasion, and maintain its independence of larger and wealthier religious bodies such as Baptists who attempted to draw Benito under their aegis.

Guenther noticed, that “these immigrant-based denominations often began in difficult pioneering conditions made worse during the economically depressed 1930s… Many did not use the English language – at least at the outset. As these denominations

\textsuperscript{71} Bramadat and Seljak, “Charting the New Terrain: Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada”, 23. 
\textsuperscript{72} Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada,” 366. 
\textsuperscript{73} Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada,” 369.
became more established, and they made the transition to using English, they became more aware of others with whom they shared a common evangelical theological and social ethos.\textsuperscript{74} Much was written about conditions of the Benito pioneers and their struggle for survival. However, it should be noted that, in spite of the fact that the church identified with the goals, aspirations, and techniques of the Canadian evangelical movement fairly soon, it consciously resisted the temptations to abandon the heritage language(s) and switch to English. The Slavic Evangelicals, as it was shown in previous chapters, had their own reasons to maintain the use of heritage languages in spite of a high level of integration into the Canadian evangelical world. The main such reason was the inherited Slavic messianism of the Prokhanovite Union, and a surviving vision of the special mission of their Union in the Slavic-speaking world. The language, naturally, was regarded as an important tool as the movement was working towards its goal. This appears to be the most plausible explanation of the surprisingly prolonged period of the heritage language retention in the Benito church in spite of its otherwise open character and few barriers on the way to assimilation.

Regehr listed a few reasons of retention of the German language among Canadian Mennonites. Among them there are the role of German as a barrier against the worldly influence, the belief that the Mennonite faith cannot function outside the German language milieu, the appreciation of the German language as a deposit of religious and literary treasures, and the lack of knowledge of English among some Mennonite ministers.\textsuperscript{75} In spite of all these considerations, even though “arrival of postwar

\textsuperscript{74} Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada, 370-71.
\textsuperscript{75} Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 313-314.
immigrants… delayed change in some congregations, …by the end of the 1950s the transition has been made in most Canadian Mennonite churches.”

The Benito Evangelical Christians would not identify with some of the reasons listed above. For instance, as an essentially interdenominational and open movement, they did not regard their heritage language as a means to separate themselves from the world. Nor did they see any link between a particular language and Christianity, or even their specific type of Christianity. Yet, the degree of the language retention in Benito was remarkably high throughout the lifetime of the community. During all seventy years of its existence the heritage language was consistently used in the worship and as the primary language of communication on the family and community level. For the Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s and 1940s the transition to English on a church level took a generation or less, while the Benito church continued the use of the heritage language until its disintegration.

The Benito church identified from its early years as a Russian-Ukrainian one. This contrasted sharply with the vast majority of manifold Ukrainian religious, political, cultural, and educational institutions in Canada. The Ukrainian identity in Canada was a product of a domestic development much rather it was an identity transplanted from the old country. “Although ostensibly presented as a unified ethnic group, it is apparent that Ukrainians were divided by religion and terms of ethnic self-identification.” The basis for the emerging Ukrainian Canadian identification was negotiated mainly between two main religiously different groups of settlers – Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. These two groups represented masses of Ukrainian settlers in Canada and came to

76 Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 314.
77 Tataryn, “Canada’s Eastern Christians” in Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada, 295.
represent the Ukrainian community in the eyes of Canadians. The Ukrainian Evangelical immigrants, although small in numbers, were yet another group of Ukrainians, separated by religion from the bulk of the Ukrainian Canadian population. Pushed to the margins of the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic life and activities, dominated by two main groups, Ukrainian Evangelicals, together with Russian and Belorussian Evangelical Christians, developed a unique ethno-religious identity, which in some ways closely resembled other ethno-religious immigrant groups, such as Mennonites.

One marker of this ethno-religious identity of Slavic Evangelicals is a peculiar situation with the heritage languages, where the “Slavic language,” a mix of Ukrainian, Russian, and Belorussian of sorts, became a de facto language of the church. Another important aspect is their minimal involvement with the activities of larger groups of the same extraction, such as bilingual Ukrainian schools, political nationalism of the post-war years exhibited by some Ukrainian Canadians, or an inclination to the left wing of the Canadian political spectrum and nostalgic ties to the old country, apparent among some members of the Russian Canadian community.

The interviews conducted for the purpose of this study often included a bizarre mix of languages. Most interesting, often interviewees did not only jump to English and back, but the very “heritage language” they used was not easy to determine unequivocally as either Russian, or Ukrainian, or Belorussian. Their speech often combined traits of all three closely related and mutually intelligible languages. The speakers seemed to be aware of this interesting feature of their speech, and tended to call it “the Slavic language,” (slavianskii iazyk) or “our language” (nash iazyk) instead of Ukrainian or

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78 Tataryn, “Canada’s Eastern Christians” in Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada, 292.
Russian.\textsuperscript{79} Surviving early written documents produced in Benito by original church members reveal the same mixture of languages. (See appendix I to Chapter IV). At the same time speakers were often able to employ literary Russian or literary Ukrainians when it was required or appropriate, such as under formal circumstances. This situation is not unlike the one that existed among Canadian Mennonites with Pennsylvania German and Low German, “two dialects, the contribution of which to Mennonite isolation and self-preservation may not be overlooked.”\textsuperscript{80} The diffusion among Eastern Slavic languages and resulting hybrid dialectal forms is nothing new or unique \textit{per se}.\textsuperscript{81}

However, under the circumstances in mid- and late 20\textsuperscript{th} century Canadian Prairies the “Slavic language” inadvertently served as a strong marker distinguishing the Slavic Evangelicals from much more nationally conscious Ukrainian Catholic or Orthodox, promoting the “proper” literary Ukrainian, or Russian Canadians using standard Russian. At the same time standard Russian and Ukrainian remained “official” languages of the denominations, used in editions of church songbooks, magazines, and publications, much in the same manner as High German was the “official” language of the Mennonites, reserved for educational, ritual and other “high profile” purposes.\textsuperscript{82}

Evangelical Christians remained deliberately estranged from the political initiatives or tendencies within the larger Ukrainian Canadian or Russian Canadian communities. It was established in the previous chapters, that the Benito church and other

\textsuperscript{79} Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009. Also Sergey Petrov. Interview with Ivan Sidorchuk, Paysandú, Uruguay, May 7, 2008 showing the same tendency among Slavic Evangelical Christians in South America.


\textsuperscript{82} For example, the Low German translation of the Bible published in 2003 “met with opposition from many Mennonites” (Royden Loewen, “Ethnicity and Religion among Canada’s Mennonites” in \textit{Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada}, 355).
Slavic Evangelical churches consciously refrained from nationalism of any sort. When the influx of post-war Ukrainian immigrants caused a drift towards political anti-Communism and, in some extreme cases, sheer russophobia within the Ukrainian Canadian community, Slavic Evangelicals remained untouched by this tendency. On the other hand, they rejected a strong tendency among some Russian Canadians (especially those of Doukhobor descent) to associate more closely with the Soviet Union as a historical fatherland and to cherish feelings that are “not merely a sentimental longing for a lost fatherland. [They] also provided, on occasion, the vision of an alternative way of life.”83 This nostalgia was at times accompanied by a political stance or preferences: “criticism of Soviet policies among Doukhobors is noticeably mild… This is not because Doukhobors are crypto-Communists… It is rather because they still like to think of themselves as Russian, in culture, if not in citizenship.”84 Evangelical Christians did not join nationalism of larger ethnic groups. They still followed Prokhanov’s slogan “no politics, no polemics, just Gospel” (ni politiki, ni polemiki, tol’ko Evangelie). Interviews or written sources on Evangelical Christians did not reveal any special allegiance they felt to Russia, Ukraine, or Poland. They remembered and respected their countries of birth, were grateful to Canada for freedoms and material prosperity, but their most deeply felt allegiance belonged to the heavenly homeland.85

By the way of comparison, Mennonites as an ethno-religious community have been known and generally perceived themselves as separate people with no allegiance to any political state or country. However, at times, by force of circumstances, groups of

83 Woodcock and Avakumovic, The Doukhobors, 262.
84 Woodcock and Avakumovic, The Doukhobors, 360.
Mennonites deviated from this principle, claiming Dutch ancestry and invoking assistance of The Netherlands during post WWII years, or exhibiting loyalty to Germany as a political state. Some Evangelical Christians followed the same pattern, taking up “convenience identities,” for instance, that of Polish citizens to avoid repatriation to USSR during the first post-war years.

Evangelical Christians demonstrated significantly different patterns of fragmentation than did Mennonites or Doukhobors. Mennonites have historically been prone to a fragmentation. Epp pointed to the peacemaking effect of internal divisions within the Mennonite church “as ways were found for different points of view to exist side by side in a more harmonious way in the respective communities.” As the Mennonite movement diversified, the fragmentation provided a response to challenges of urbanization, assimilation, “Canadianization,” growing ethnic diversity of the Mennonitism, and conservative reactions to these challenges. Mennonite communities, without losing or drifting away from their Mennonite identity, divided over such issues as the use of English in worship, acceptance of public schools, acceptance of modern farm equipment, power struggle between community leaders, to name just a few. At this point in time the wider Mennonite church impresses an observer and a scholar of religion alike with its extreme diversity, from ultra-conservative farming German culture of Old Order Mennonites to liberal urban English-speaking Mennonites, almost

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87 Sergey Petrov. Interview with A. Benito, Manitoba, October 28, 2009.
89 Loewen, “Ethnicity and Religion among Canada’s Mennonites,” 331.
indistinguishable from their neighbours to African and Asian converts to the Mennonite faith.

Initial divisions within the Canadian Doukhobors occurred fairly early, within a few years from their arrival in Canada. Some Doukhobor authors asserted that these divisions in a latent form existed already in Russia prior to their migration.91 Three groups of Doukhobors, Independents, Orthodox (Community) Doukhobors, and Sons of Freedom, differed from each other mainly by their response to the government regulations concerning their resettlement and life in Canada. In fact, the divisions became apparent as a result of the divergence of opinions and attitudes to specific government policies. The Independent Doukhobors of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, strong and numerous in and around Kamsack, split off the larger group of Doukhobors over the issue of individual land ownership.92 The Independents complied with the government policy of independent taking of homesteads, and, in many cases became British subjects. This severed their ties with the Community Doukhobors who did not accept the private ownership of land, and, in 1907, abandoned their former land reserves repossessed by the government, and moved to British Columbia.

Sons of Freedom, the most radical and opposed to assimilation group, represented a trend within Doukhoborism from the very first years in Canada. However, the peak of the influence of this group (and probably the peak numbers) fell on the period from 1930s to the early 1960s, after the second Doukhobor communal enterprise failed in the late 1930s, and the Community Doukhobors remained without leadership following the death

91 For instance, Petr Malov, *Dukhobortsy, ikh istoria, zhizn’ i bor’ba (Doukhobors, Their History, Life, and Struggle)* (Thrums, BC: 1948), 173.
92 This area historically was a part of the Doukhobor North Reserve. See Carl J. Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), esp. 172-182.
of Petr Petrovich Verigin in 1937. As Woodcock and Avakumovic noted, “the Independents, the members of the Union of the Spiritual Communities of Christ [Community Doukhobors] and even the more moderate of the Sons of Freedom differed from each other only in the degree of their acceptance; and it is possible to interpret even the acts of protest and terror… as a desperate last-ditch action against a process of inevitable change.” The Independent Doukhobor community, members of which were numerous in and around Kamsack and Benito, did not separate themselves from the mainstream of the Canadian life. While most Doukhobors in British Columbia did not complete high school (as of 1930s), the Independents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba had doctors, lawyers, and engineers among their ranks.

The church of Slavic Evangelical Christians in Benito (as well as the Union of Evangelical Christians Canada-wide) suffered one instance of fragmentation discussed in one of previous chapters. For as much as one can judge based upon existing evidence, it had internal reasons, and eventually ended in reconciliation. There is no evidence of any doctrinal strife or disagreement among the Benito members or the Slavic Evangelical movement elsewhere in Canada. This might suggest a better potential resistance of a religious community to pressures from inside and outside, and, therefore, its relative potential longevity. This, however, did not prove to have been the case with the Benito church or Slavic Evangelical Christians in general. In spite of the virtual absence of internal fragmentation, the movement dwindled in numbers and became dormant within a relatively short period of time.

93 George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Carleton Libabry, 1977), 333.
An example of the Mennonite and Doukhobor communities in Canada shows that pressures from outside, internal discord, multiple and diverse responses of the community members to such pressures did not in the long run lead to a major decrease in the membership nor to the disintegration of an ethno-religious community. Although Mennonites are increasingly becoming an urban church, and the process of urbanization appears to be irreversible, this did not lead to a major membership or identity crisis within the community, and much less to its lethargy.

Ted Regehr argued that the life of Mennonites in Canada after 1939 testified to their rapid and multifaceted transformation. If Canadian Mennonites of the earlier period (until 1920) were, in the words of Frank Epp, best characterized as “separate people,” while the interwar experience with the wave of new immigrants of the 1920s and the depression years highlighted “the people’s struggle for survival,” the post-war Mennonites were “a people transformed.” Regehr further argued that the key to the understanding of the transformation of Canadian Mennonites is in the notion of accommodation as opposed to assimilation. Some Mennonites assimilated as traditional farming declined, and they increasingly became exposed to the influence of modernity, and are now “an indistinguishable part of the dominant culture, society, or nation.”

However, most Mennonites were able to make “major adjustments or changes while still retaining its own identity, values, and traditions.” Accommodation, as an alternative to assimilation or a separation, was especially facilitated by an increasing toleration within the Canadian society in the post-war period and a growing awareness of the multicultural

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character of the country. As a result, Mennonites survived the transitional time as a cohesive and distinguishable community. At the same time, most contemporary Mennonites in Canada are very well integrated into the life of the country at all levels.

The transformation Doukhobors underwent in post-war Canada has been similar to that of the Mennonites. The Independent Doukhobors, in particular, “while remaining Doukhobors, soon became prosperous farmers. Their sons and daughters, over several generations, adopted the ways of the dominant society, aspired to higher education, and achieved many of the prestigious occupations of the larger society.”\(^9\) The fragmentation and pressures from inside and outside did not cause the collapse of the Doukhoborism in Canada. In fact, while the Benito church closed down in the mid 1990s, the Kamsack Prayer Home and the Kamsack Doukhobor Society are still functioning and active as of 2010.

Therefore, Canadian Mennonites and Doukhobors, along with common problems of assimilation, urbanization, loss of heritage language, demise of the traditional economy, also faced specific challenges of discrimination, at times prejudice, and internal discord and fragmentation. Eventually, however, they found new forms and ways to express, maintain and strengthen their identity. Although accurate in the case of Canadian Mennonites and Doukhobors, this pattern does not seem to fit the story of Slavic Evangelical Christians just as nicely. While other comparable ethno-religious communities took up the path of accommodation, Slavic Evangelicals, who enjoyed a better acceptance of the wider society, and managed to avoid conflict with their

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neighbours or the government, virtually melted down and were assimilated into the surrounding society.

The goal of this research is to give a plausible answer to the question what led to the disintegration of the Slavic Evangelical movement. Although the effect of the challenges mentioned above cannot be dismissed, they could not possibly have caused the death of the movement, as they have not in the case of Mennonites or Doukhobors. The reasons of the premature death of the church are to be sought elsewhere. The movement lost its momentum and prophetic impulse that gave it vitality in the first place. The original Slavic Evangelical project with its far-fetching goals and hopes failed, and it ceased to be sustainable in spite of considerably lesser pressure the movement had to cope with compared to similar ethno-religious bodies in mid and late 20th century Canada.

Conclusion

Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada constructed their identity mainly along the following lines: 1) their religion, 2) their complex ethnic composition and a sense of trans-ethnic unity, 3) their relationship with the wider world of evangelicalism, and 4) their belief in specific mission transcending ethnic and denominational boundaries. Their experience in Canada generally followed the logic of development of the Canadian evangelicalism. The Bible school movement, home and foreign mission, rising inter-denominational activity and trans-denominational awareness, modern methods of preaching were all aspects of the Slavic Evangelical experience in Canada.

At the same time, a comparison with similar group of religious settlers in western Canada, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors, reveals significantly different responses to
similar challenges. Slavic Evangelical Christians did not differ from most of their Canadian neighbours in terms of economy, and never challenged mainstream economic patterns. Being relatively late newcomers and, especially, by the virtue of their Protestant religion, they were not subject to any noticeable prejudice, discrimination, or unfair treatment by either the authorities or their neighbours. They did not object to public schools, and exhibited no allegiance to foreign powers or the old country. They managed to avoid a large-scale fragmentation, and did not divide along the lines of acceptance of modernity. Yet, while Mennonites and Doukhobors in most cases reshaped and reaffirmed their identity, either strengthening their conservatism or (in most cases) accepting modernity, Slavic Evangelicals largely collapsed as a movement. This difference is best explained by a 1) failure of a particular prophetic project of Slavic Evangelicals, and 2) their high degree of integration into mainstream Canadian evangelicalism. When the Slavic Evangelical movement lost its prophetic momentum, there was not much left to distinguish them from most Canadian evangelicals.

Simultaneously, as the group was losing its cohesion and a sense of a common particular purpose, it was losing its traits as an ethno-religious entity. While, in the words of Regehr, “most [Mennonites]… accommodated themselves, modifying, but not losing or abandoning, what they considered essential elements of their own heritage,”99 Slavic Evangelical Christians assimilated, following the disintegration of their specific ethno-religious identity.

99 Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 4.
Chapter VIII. Slavic Evangelical Biographies: Two Portraits of Early Protestant Settlers in Canada

Autobiography, correspondence, and diaries are becoming increasingly relevant as scholars strive to discover formerly hidden layers of the human experience. The area of immigrant experience in Western Canada, and that of religious experience in particular, is experiencing a true boom of scholarly interest. Recently Royden Loewen’s and Julie Rak’s books as well as Heather Coleman’s work devoted to the Russian Mennonites, the Doukhobors in Canada, and Baptists in Russia respectively, attest to the importance of this fresh approach.

This chapter will only cover two biographical accounts written by or about early Slavic Evangelical settlers in Canada. One of them, the life story of Feoktist Dunaenko (ca. 1860-1920s?), is an autobiographical piece written after 1917, most probably, in the 1920s, while the other, the posthumous biography of Ivan Shakotko (1880-1960), was written by his descendant Mike Shakotko after Ivan’s death. Both samples offer an inside view of how the pioneers viewed and made sense out of their own experiences in the strange land, explain their underlying motivations, and add a human dimension to the whole story of the Slavic Evangelical presence in the Canadian West.

3 Julie Rak, Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).
This overview, along with the pieces of oral history, analyzed in the previous chapters, is only the beginning of a more thorough study based upon sources, which belong to “unofficial history.” Such a study could reveal a more private domain of the immigrant experience and, subsequently, make it relevant to current scholarly discourse within the field of religiously motivated immigration to Canada. The specific purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it intends to complement the materials gathered through the interviews with the testimony pertaining to the earlier period of Slavic Protestant immigration to Canada. Then, it will look at the early Slavic Protestant spiritual biography and autobiography as a literary genre with its specific purpose, goals, and readership. This genre is different from a much more common genre of conversion narratives in the strict sense in that it covers a much wider time period and is not concerned mainly with conveying a personal conversion experience. In our case, remarkably, both pieces describe a migratory experience and the life in the new country. Heather Coleman examined over a hundred of conversion narratives in her study of this wide-spread genre.\(^5\) Spiritual biographies and autobiographies of Russian Protestants are much less common.

In addition, this chapter will look at the experience of early Slavic Protestant settlers in the Prairies through the prism of the idea of New Jerusalem, which, directly or indirectly, enabled “the vast Canadian continent… [to] produce such a large number of religious communities.”\(^6\) Without any intention to deny an economic or materialistic

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component in the decision to immigrate, this chapter will demonstrate another layer of motivation and expectations present in early Slavic Protestant migrations to Canada.

**Feoktist Dunaenko (ca. 1860 - after 1917)**

In his *Hidden Worlds* Royden Loewen points to the multidimensionality of the immigrant perception of the world around them. Loewen writes about Mennonite immigrants from Russia: “This world, shared with other immigrants, was part farm, part German, part continental European, and part capitalist. Ironically, these shared worlds have sometimes been the most hidden, despite the concern of ethnic historiographies to highlight the unique features of any given community.”

The life experience of Feoktist Dunaenko, a Slavic Evangelical immigrant pioneer in the Prairies, was a tangible example of a multidimensional world. In fact, unlike many Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor groups, which tended to create insular communities, Slavic Evangelicals always were on the forefront of interaction, diffusion, cross influence, and assimilation, creatively absorbing various influences and amalgamating them into new forms. This makes their “hidden worlds” among the most interesting examples of immigrant experiences in Canada.

The Autobiography of Feoktist Dunaenko, (ca.1860- after 1917), is a fairly rare example of an autobiographical text produced by an early Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical believer, and one of the earliest Slavic Evangelical settlers in the Canadian West. Dunaenko was born into a typical middle income Orthodox peasant family, converted to rising Slavic Protestantism as many did at that time, suffered from discrimination and

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mistreatment along with thousands of his fellow-believers, was exiled, and, finally, joined a host of other religious immigrants from the Tsarist Russia. He never was a pastor, a famous preacher, or a recognized author. What is highly atypical, however, is that he bothered to write a fairly substantial autobiography. Of course, no one interested in the Russian Evangelical movement will miss such classical works as *In the Cauldron of Russia* by Ivan Prokhanov,8 *In the Flame of Russia’s Revolution* by Nikolai Salov-Astakhov,9 *Twice-Born Russian* by Peter Deynega,10 *Christians under the Hammer and Sickle* and *My Life in Soviet Russia* by Paul Voronaeff,11 or *With Christ in Soviet Russia* by Vladimir Martzinkovski.12 However, these autobiographical books are literary works produced by educated authors with very a specific ideological agenda. They were published and re-published in the West to a great degree due to their political topicality during the Communist rule in Russia. Magazines of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Russia and the USSR from 1905 to the late 1920s (such as *Khristianin, Baptist,* and *Baptist Ukrainy*) abounded with conversion narratives and short autobiographical stories, but the Dunaenko life story is a fairly rare example of a Russian Evangelical spiritual autobiography (not just a conversion story) of the early period written by a rank-and-file believer that covers an immigration experience. The very fact that Dunaenko was a simple peasant with no part in the complex politics of church-building, church administration, and with no expressed political position, gives an attentive reader access

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to the “hidden worlds” of his life experience. Dunaenko’s life story is marked by an obvious lack of literary sophistication, and an extraordinary level of intimacy and sincerity.

Exile and wandering for Christ’s sake constituted an important part of Dunaenko’s life. The spiritual reinterpretation of and reconciliation with his wandering is an ongoing theme of his Autobiography. The main conclusion Dunaenko wanted to convey to his readers was that wandering is a spiritually meaningful and rewarding experience for the followers of Christ. Given its wide-spread use as a spiritual pamphlet after its first publication, the Autobiography reflects the motivations and goals behind the whole early Russian and Ukrainian Evangelical immigration into Canada.

The autobiography was written by Feoktist Dunaenko when he was already in Canada, probably, towards the end of his life. The latest events he described referred to 1917. Nikolai Vodnevsky, a US-based Russian Christian publisher and author, received the manuscript of the Autobiography in the mail, apparently sent to him by some surviving relatives after Dunaenko’s death. According to Vodnevsky’s own account, at first he paid no attention to it, and stored the manuscript in his archives. Years later, cleaning up his archives, he discovered Dunaenko’s text again, and was about to dispose of it, but his “inner voice” stopped him. Vodnevsky re-read the manuscript, and was deeply impressed by the author’s sincerity, faithfulness in trials, spirit of forgiveness and love for his enemies. Vodnevsky published the Autobiography in 1975 in the format of a brochure under the title “He Endured till the End (Do kontsa preterpevshii).”¹³ The brochure did not contain any publication data, since much of the literature published by

¹³ Feoktist Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii (He Endured till the End), N. Vodnevsky, ed. (No publication data), 6-7.
Western Christian publishing houses in Russian was meant for sending (often smuggling) back into the USSR. Since the break up of the Soviet Union the Autobiography has been re-published by Christian publishers in Russia and the Ukraine. However, in spite of its important position as a source on life experience of early Slavic Evangelical settlers in Canada, it has never been the focus of scholarly attention. The text of the biography is written in highly correct, bookish Russian without any traces of Ukrainian words, any local dialect peculiarities, or archaisms. It would be unrealistic to expect such kind of a language from a peasant with little formal education. In all probability, the text was edited by Vodnevsky for the purposes of publication. This analysis is divided into three parts. The first one tells the pre-history and circumstances of his conversion, the second one is a narrative of the ordeals Dunaenko had to endure for the sake of his faith, and the last one is the story of his life in Canada.

Dunaenko was born around 1860 into a peasant Orthodox family near the town of Uman in the south-western part of the Russian empire, now central Ukraine. He was a devout Orthodox believer from his childhood. He regularly sang in church and had a good reputation with the local priest and congregation. His young adult years coincided with the birth and rapid spread of the Stundist movement in Southern Russia. This movement was born in the 1860s under the direct influence of such factors as the Pietist revival among numerous Mennonite and Lutheran colonies in Southern Russia, local traditions of religious dissent, such as the movement of the Molokans, and the publication...

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14 On the smuggling of religious literature into the USSR during the Cold War please see Brother Andrew (Andrew van der Bijl), with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, God’s Smuggler (Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1967) and Brother Andrew, The Ethics of Smuggling (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. Inc., 1974).
of the Bible in vernacular by 1872. Similar movements appeared at the same time in the Caucasus and in Saint-Petersburg. In the early 1900s, Evangelical dissenters founded two unions with similar theology and practice, the Union of Baptists, and the Union of Evangelical Christians.

One of the most prominent early Stundist leaders in the Ukraine was Ivan Grigor’evich Riaboshapka (1831-1900), a miller from the village of Liubomirka near Kherson, the area saturated with German colonies and Molokan sectarians. Riaboshapka converted under the influence of his friend, the German blacksmith Martin Hübner, a member of a local Pietist Lutheran community. Later he was baptized by another prominent leader of the early Ukrainian Stundism, Efim Tsymbal, who in his turn received baptism from a Brüdergemeinde minister Abraham Unger. By the time young Feoktist Dunaenko took an interest in spiritual matters, Riaboshapka was already a famous preacher. Riaboshapka planted groups of believers near where Dunaenko lived. Dunaenko’s wife started secretly attending one of these house churches.

Conversion narratives of early Russian Evangelical Christians have been studied in detail by Heather Coleman. She calls these conversion narratives “a major literary art form of the Russian Baptists.” Coleman argues that one of the recurring themes of the early Baptist conversion narratives was an emphasis on the genuine, internal, and domestic nature of their conversion. “The Baptist faith was widely perceived as ‘foreign’ but converts rejected this view, portraying evangelical conversion as a natural outgrowth

15 Andrew Blane also mentioned such social and economic factors as “the extraordinary social ferment that accompanied the Crimean War and the Emancipation of 1861,” see “Protestant Sects in Late Imperial Russia” in The Religious World of Russian Culture, (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 269, footnote.
17 Heather Coleman, Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929. (Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press, 2005), 47.
of broader Russian popular aspirations and, indeed, as the solution to the ignorance, hatred, hierarchy, and spiritual emptiness.”\textsuperscript{18} According to Coleman, they are, among others: “an ordinary person making his way in a changing world, …the search for salvation in Russian popular religion, …the cultural conflict within oneself and in relation to others brought on by leaving the Orthodox Church, and the emergence of a Russian evangelical community.”\textsuperscript{19} As we will see, Dunaenko also perceived his conversion as a genuine and natural act. In fact, Dunaenko’s conversion story includes themes that we observe in most such narratives.

Dunaenko described his conversion as the process that started with his authentic interest in the Bible. In a sincere attempt to figure out the biblical message, he undertook the uneasy task of reading a copy of the Bible in Old Church Slavonic, the sacred liturgical language of the Orthodox church in Slavic countries. Although the liturgical language is in some ways similar to modern Russian or Ukrainian, it is difficult for an average untrained person to understand. Reading the Bible prompted Dunaenko to seek spiritual community with like-minded believers, and he joined a local Evangelical group planted by Riaboshapka.

In an attempt to halt the spread of heresy, the Orthodox church used to send trained missionaries to areas particularly affected by sectarian movements. Typically, these missionaries set up public discussions with sectarians. Usually missionaries had far more formal education than sectarian leaders. Their ultimate goal was to dissuade sectarians and bring them to repentance. However, the recurring motif of many Russian sectarian narratives is how the educated and arrogant missionary and his “worldly

\textsuperscript{18} Coleman, \textit{Russian Baptists}, 48.
\textsuperscript{19} Coleman, \textit{Russian Baptists}, 49.
wisdom” were crushed by the clear arguments brought up by simple sectarians.20 Dunaenko’s Autobiography contributes to this tradition. During a public meeting with a missionary Dunaenko asked an elderly Orthodox believer respected for his piety, to explain in the vernacular some of the Old Church Slavonic expressions frequently used at the liturgy. It turned out that the ministrant did not know their meaning, which provoked laughter of the gathered. More importantly, the missionary had to confront Dunaenko, asking him whether he knew the meaning of those expressions, which gave Dunaenko an ample opportunity to speak about his religious views.

Immediately after the dispute the missionary in a private conversation with Dunaenko threatened him with exile. “Remember, you will be exiled! You’ll die in exile. There you will see people who dance during their prayers.21 You’ll have to leave your so-called brothers, and, possibly, for good. Is it worth leaving your wife and children?”22 To that Dunaenko replied: “Lord’s will be done.” He expressed his willingness to accept exile and interpreted it as wandering for Christ’s sake as so many in Russia had done before him.

The life of a member of a dissenting religious community in Tsarist Russia in many cases meant wandering. Sectarians and religious dissenters were among the most mobile classes of Russian society from as early as the 1660s. Then Old Believers, a large dissenting group of the Orthodox, who rejected reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon, started moving out of the immediate reach of the authorities, to the Caucasus, North,

21 “People who dance while praying” mentioned by the missionary was not a wild metaphor used to scare Dunaenko. It is a direct reference to so called Jumper Molokans, a religious community that emerged in 1830s. It is rooted in the enthusiasm caused by predictions of the beginning of the millennium in 1836 by the famous German Pietist Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687—1752), and subsequent mass immigration of Württemberg Pietist enthusiasts into southern Russia in search of refuge from the coming tribulation.
22 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 21.
Urals, Siberia, and, in some cases, abroad. Later, in the nineteenth century, such dissenting groups as Molokans, Doukhobors and Sabbatarians joined the Old Believers in their internal migrations in search of peace and freedom and moved to the Caucasus in the 1830s. It should be noted that such migrations were not always exile; a part of sectarian migrations was voluntary. The metaphor of exodus, a religiously motivated move to a new land, appears to be a recurring topic and a rhetorical tool underlying many religiously motivated migrations across the Christian world. This mode of thinking characterized Russian religious migrants as well.

Dunaenko was not exiled immediately after his debate with the missionary. He had to endure detention and brutal beatings until in May, 1894 he was ordered to settle in Transcaucasia. Dunaenko had to go there by himself, leaving his family at home. Russian Transcaucasia at that time was densely populated by religious dissenters, who comprised the vast majority of the Slavic population of the province. He did meet people who danced while praying, that is, Molokans. His experience with them, as we will see, proved to be very positive.

He soon realized that even forced exile proved to be a better choice compared to the mistreatment and discrimination he suffered in his native village. “I wrote a long letter to my wife about how I live and how I settled. In response, my wife described her life in detail. I saw that my current situation was easier than hers. She wrote that the police every day disturbed her, forcing her to baptize our children in the Orthodox church.” Finally Dunaenko’s wife decided to leave her home village and go to Transcaucasia to join her husband. Normally, at that time one needed a safe conduct from

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the old residence to move. Dunaenko’s wife, suspecting that her petition for a safe conduct would likely be refused, fled from her village, and finally joined her husband in exile. Later she managed to get a safe conduct from her previous residence by mail.

The family endured many hardships before they got established. Molokans more than once helped them in need. “Three days later a few people from the Molokan brotherhood came to see us. They saw our misery and lack of clothing. We couldn’t even clothe our children, though it was February. One Molokan took off his sheepskin coat and gave it to my wife, crying from sympathy for us. Another took three rubles out of his pocket and gave them to me with tears in his eyes.” People despised by missionaries and the establishment, those who “danced as they prayed,” proved to be Dunaenko’s partakers in wanderings for Christ’s sake. Like him, they left their homeland in the interior of the country, and wandered to the Caucasus. Most Molokans went to the Caucasus voluntarily in 1830s to take part in the glorious millennial kingdom of Christ, while Dunaenko arrived against his will, leaving his family and fellow believers. However, his exile proved to be a spiritually meaningful and rewarding experience. The example of Molokans, wanderers for Christ’s sake like himself, invigorated and encouraged him throughout his exile.

Materially, Dunaenko’s life was extremely difficult, as is evident from the story of the kind Molokans. There was not enough work, and earnings were inadequate for a family. In addition, Dunaenko had to spend money on rent. Nevertheless, “in a word, it

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25 The idea of the coming millenarian Kingdom with its centre at Mount Ararat in the Caucasus, and 1836 as the year of the establishment of the Kingdom was widely accepted by the Molokans by 1833. The prophecy increased the enthusiasm of those Molokans who were on the move to the Transcaucasian provinces, open for the resettlement of sectarians according to the 1830 Decree of Nicholas I.
was difficult, but we glorified God that neither the police nor Orthodox priests oppress us here.”

After seven years in exile (in 1901) the Dunaekos were expecting to be able to return to their native village, but their exile was extended for two more years. When they were finally given freedom, they returned to Ukraine to discover that their house, land and mill had been taken over by Feoktist’s brother. However, after some time Dunaenko regained some of his reputation among his neighbours, and was elected a representative of his rural community before higher administration, “possibly because I was a bit more literate than others and have seen a lot.” It should be noted that in 1905 the Manifesto of Religious Toleration came into effect. The Manifesto permitted many groups of religious dissenters to legalize their existence. Among other rights, sectarians received the right to conduct the registry of civil statistics of their members independently from the Orthodox church.

Nevertheless, mistreatment of religious dissidents, especially those that were deemed “foreign” did not stop. Coleman says that even after the 1905 Manifesto sectarians were still perceived as dangerous, not just from the point of view of the authorities, but there existed “popular violence against evangelicals in the villages. For in the village, too, the converts were perceived as dangerous – to traditional, social, family, and religious relationships.” After a series of threats from the local police officer Dunaenko decided to apply for a passport to travel abroad. The police officer replied: “Good riddance. You have nothing to do here. You just make people’s heads spin [with your preaching].” Dunaenko and his family were happy the authorities did not interfere

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26 Dunaenko, *Do kontsa preterpevshii*, 40.
27 Dunaenko, *Do kontsa preterpevshii*, 46.
28 Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 68.
with their decision to leave the country. They got their passports without hindrance, and
packed up to sail to the New World. Of course, his previous spiritually positive
experience in the Caucasian exile allowed Dunaenko to see a new stage of wandering
from a positive perspective. He knew that it was God that made his life meaningful and
happy, no matter where he went. Smillie suggested that “many of the people who
immigrated to the West identified themselves as a pilgrim people not with an earthly, but
a heavenly destination.”29 This allows us to consider the migratory experience, and, more
specifically, the motivation of Feoktist Dunaenko as pursuit of New Jerusalem as
heavenly city.

Dunaenko and his large family of six children came to Canada in 1910. He never
mentioned specifically any geographical names in the new country; however it was
possible to find some evidence that he probably lived in or near the town of Bonnyville,
Alberta, a future home to a church of Slavic Evangelical Christians.30 According to
Smillie, solidarity with fellow-believers was one of the important traits of those settlers
who perceived their migration in religious terms as pilgrimage.31 They made their home
near a larger Ukrainian rural settlement. Most other people in the neighbourhood were
Galicians. At that time Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Dunaenko
calls his neighbours “Austrians.” Apparently, he was given a standard homestead of
virgin land where he had to “cut the trees, root out stumps, break large stones.”32 As

29 Smillie, Introduction to Visions of the New Jerusalem, 7.
30 See thread maintained by some of Feoktists Dunaenko’s descendants at a genealogical message board at
http://boards.ancestry.ca/localities.northam.canada.alberta.bonnyville/142.2.1.1.1.1/mb.ashx (URL valid as
of July 29, 2010). It appears that many members of the Dunaenko’s family had lived in Bonnyville. In all
probability, they remained Protestants, for Samuel Dunaenko (1894-1975), Feoktist’s son, and other family
members were buried in United Church of Canada cemeteries. According to Shenderovskii (Evangel’skie
Kristiane, 331), Bonnyville was still a home to a church of Slavic Evangelical Christians as of 1980.
31 Smillie, Introduction to Visions of the New Jerusalem, 8.
32 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 47.
many other immigrants in the Prairies at that time, Dunaenko was not able to live off his farm right away, and had to seek temporary employment that would give him an immediate source of income. He worked for a railway, apparently, a CPR line, that was located 85 miles from his homestead. After having earned a bit of money, he returned to the homestead and built a sod house together with his wife. “We carried building materials on our own shoulders, fell down of tiredness, yet we built a hut, and covered it with sod. When it was raining, water was dripping into the house. We both thought: “When will our misfortunes and poverty end?”33 Compared to the level of material well-being before the exile (Dunaenko had a house, a mill, and some land), his life in Canada seems to be exceedingly hard. However, Dunaenko and his family felt happy, because, as he plainly stated, “there are no… zealous priests, but freedom of word and conscience.”34 So, wandering that is so hard from the fleshly point of view proves to be a fruitful spiritual experience, and, indeed, realization of God’s will. Dunaenko refers to a popular proverb, trying to make his point clear: “Without God do not step over your threshold, but with God you may go even overseas.”35

Dunaenko defined his own identity in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion. First of all, it is notable that Dunaenko very rarely spoke of himself in clear ethnic terms. He was born in the heartland of the present-day Ukrainian state. Apparently, his mother tongue was a southern dialect of the Ukrainian language. However, he must have been highly proficient in standard literary Russian, for he constantly read the Bible in the Russian vernacular from early on. In the Transcaucasian exile, where people of Slavic origin comprised only a small minority, Dunaenko and his family associated mostly with

33 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 47.
34 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 49.
35 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 50.
Russians, and were perceived as such by the autochthonous population. In Canada, where Galicians, immigrants from what is now Western Ukraine, prevailed, he identified himself as Ukrainian, although showing an awareness of linguistic, cultural, and religious differences between Galicians and “Russian” Ukrainians. “It’s difficult for me to speak to them. Both I and they are Ukrainians. But I’m a Russian Ukrainian, and they are Austrian.” At the same time, he reports reading the Gospel in the Ukrainian language in Canada. Catholic Poles engaged in religious conversations that Dunaenko conducted with his Galician fellow workers. Apparently, they were able to elaborate a common Slavic lingua franca to comprehend each other. What his example shows is, of course not that Dunaenko struggled with his self-identification, or that he was a victim of russification, polonization, canadization or any other influences. As we know him from his Autobiography, Dunaenko was wholesome and happy, and in spite of all his hardships, a person of integrity. First, he did not see Ukrainian or Russian identity as necessarily separate or opposing each other in terms of culture, language, and mentality; it simply did not appear to create any internal conflict. Second, for Dunaenko, and, as the author believes, for Slavic Evangelical immigrants in general, ethnicity was not the primary means of self-identification. Rather, it was their religious convictions, common background, shared aspirations and partaking in the same process of a spiritually meaningful wandering, that shaped their identity.

In spite of the fact that Dunaenko never was a famous or prominent person, research has turned up external evidence of his life, although rudimentary and brief. Ludwig Szenderowski, engineer, pastor, and a son of a leader of Evangelical Christians in

36 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 47.
37 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 48.
38 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 48.
Poland, mentioned Dunaenko in his historical essay on Evangelical Christians. In the section on Evangelical Christians in Canada he wrote: “The First Evangelical settlers in Canada from around year 1900 were the following families: Saveliev, Pavlov, Fedorov, Gavrilov, Muzyko, Lemberg, Mazurenko, Dunaenko, Egorov, Shecherbinin, and many others. All of them without exception settled in free Canada on homesteads granted by the government in western Canada – in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.” Some of the aforementioned family names (though not Dunaenko) we can find also in the book of the leader of Ukrainian Baptists in Canada, Petro Kindrat, among the first Baptist immigrants from Kiev and Caucasus that formed the nucleus of the Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist church in Winnipeg. Dunaenko, as it follows from his Autobiography, preached in his local church, but that apparently took place in a rural setting.

We do not know when Dunaenko passed away. The last time reference he mentioned specifically in his life story was Easter, 1917, when his friend’s wife converted. However, according to Dunaenko, “I have missed much in my notes. If I wrote in detail, it would have been a thick book.” The main conclusion Feoktist Dunaenko wanted to share with his readers was that he “had seen many people, had been to many cities until finally arrived in a foreign land. But with Christ one is at home everywhere.” Thus, physical wandering was perceived by Dunaenko as an integral part and a tangible expression of walking with Christ, which emphasized and confirmed that

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41 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 51.
42 Dunaenko, Do kontsa preterpevshii, 51.
an earthly homeland is temporary, and that he unconditionally belongs only to God. Feoktist Dunaenko felt a part of that sequence of “pioneers of the past, who in their covenant with god believed God would be with them in all the changing scenes of life in trouble and in joy.”

In spite of the simplicity of the text and the lack of factual information about the author, the Autobiography, popularized by N. Vodnevsky, has been widely known among Slavic Evangelical believers both in the (ex-)USSR and abroad. This was possible because Dunaenko personified a role model for generations of Protestant believers. The milestones of his experience, a quest for God, a conversion, persecution, suffering, and emigration, were replicated by many thousands of others. His story, a singular story of an individual, was unique in its universality.

Ivan Shakotko (1880-1960)

Shakotko’s story, written by his descendant Mike Shakotko in the English language, is in fact an extensive obituary, devoted to the memory of the well-known in Western Canada Slavic Evangelical leader. Hence, the biography was written some time after Shakotko’s death in 1960. At the time the biography was written, the majority of Ukrainian and Russian Protestant believers residing in Canada were bilingual, or, in any case, well-versed in English. The text in English was directed toward English-speaking Baptists, since Ivan Shakotko was a paid minister of the Western Baptist Union of Canada for most of his life.

43 Smillie, Introduction to *Visions of the New Jerusalem*, 11.
44 The author of this thesis gained access to Shakotko’s biography through a personal friend of his, who, in turn, received a print-out of the text from Stepan Shakotko, Ivan’s son who died around 2004. It is not certain whether the biography has ever been published. For the purposes of this thesis the page numeration follows the computer print-out in the possession of the author.
The purpose of the text is threefold. First of all, this is an obituary, a posthumous tribute to the person who devoted his entire life to the mission work, often under difficult or adverse conditions. Second, the biography is a historical statement. After Shakotko’s death, that is from 1960s onward, new immigrants from Ukraine or Russia did not arrive in Canada any longer, the assimilation process was accelerating, and the life of Slavic Protestant communities in general was becoming increasingly stagnant. Reflecting on the past among Slavic Protestants was on the increase and preserving the history came to be a concern of many among their ranks. A detailed outline of the life of a prominent Slavic Evangelical Baptist believer both in the native country and in Canada served the purpose of preserving the history of the movement for generations to come. Finally, the biography is a doctrinal and ethical statement. The challenges Shakotko faced throughout his life and his responses to them, based upon Gospel precepts, are meant to be a moral guide for others. In this respect, Shakotko is portrayed in the biography as a role model for the younger generations of believers.

Ivan Shakotko’s early life bears a fair bit of resemblance to that of Feoktist Dunaenko. Both were born in what used to be the “Russian” Ukraine, that is, on the eastern side of the border, dividing the Orthodox East from the Catholic and Uniate West, for centuries dominated by the Polish and Austro-Hungarians. Shakotko was born in a fairly large village of Slout in the vicinity of the city of Chernigov (Ukr. Chernihiv), an ancient capital of a medieval Rus principality, a city of many churches, relics, and monasteries. Just like Dunaenko, Shakotko was born and raised Orthodox. The biography says, that “[Ivan’s] mother was related to the priest in the town who attained a high church
dignitary’s position of Proto-hierarch [or, more precisely, protoierei].”45 Shakotko’s more urban and higher-rank background as compared to that of Dunaenko, possibly contributed to the higher degree of prominence Ivan later acquired among believers in Canada.

The biography, not unlike many typical conversion stories, tells how young Ivan grew up in the pious atmosphere of Orthodox prayer, elaborate ritual, and listening to the long stories from the Orthodox saints’ lives. Convinced of the deep sinfulness of this world and its ways, Ivan even considered joining one of the Orthodox monasteries.46 “The inherited religious sense of feeling, and thirst to find God,”47 according to the biography, was the only motivation for Ivan’s further personal spiritual endeavours. There is no reason to doubt this version of the story; however, it would be appropriate to note that in the second half of the 19th century the need and the call of many for a religious reform were in the air.48 Shakotko became one of these seekers for truth, which soon brought him into a contact with the bourgeoning Stundist movement.

One of the common ways to spread the Gospel message in Russia at that time was the work of so called colporteurs, the itinerant distributors of spiritual literature. We do not know whether the bookseller from whom the boy first acquired Evangelical literature was a Protestant or not, but it was through literature that young Ivan was alerted to another face of Christianity, different from his childhood Orthodox experiences.

After a period of apprenticeship with a tailor, Ivan moved to the “holy city” of Kiev, where he entered the trade as an experienced tailor. The city, in spite of its numerous Orthodox holy places, was full of temptations. Living in a boarding house of sorts, Ivan tried

45 Mike Shakotko, Biography of Ivan Shakotko (n.d.), 1.
46 See Coleman, Russian Baptists, 53-54.
47 Biography of I. Shakotko, 1.
to resist those temptations for as much as he could by reading the New Testament.\textsuperscript{49}

Apparently, the habit of reading the Bible per se was closely associated with the customs of the Protestant sectarians, so “the Stundist” became Ivan’s nickname among his comrades. Finally, Ivan decided to attend a Stundist meeting to see what the feared and despised Stundists were like for himself. As the story goes, “He heard the lively words of Christ’s teaching, and how they should be applied to every day practical life. He saw the happy faces of the people, their friendly Christian conduct toward strangers. Seeing all these things, he could not understand their secret of living. However, there was a longing in his heart to be like them.”\textsuperscript{50}

All this finally led to his wholehearted and dramatic conversion in 1897 at the age of 27. Stundism was still illegal in Russia, and the believers had to meet “in private homes, on the outskirts of the city, on account of persecution by the government.”\textsuperscript{51} Ivan’s family tried to dissuade him from his new conviction, but he remained steadfast and the following summer, in 1898, he was baptised in the river Dniepr, which had served as the baptismal site for a mass Orthodox baptism of the Rus in 988 by the order of Prince Vladimir.

The position of early Evangelical believers in Russia was leaning toward pacifism, but lacked in determination, historical tradition, and a theological foundation typical for Mennonite pacifism. When Shakotko was conscripted into the military, he did not refuse (nor could he legally claim any exemption at that time), but, rather, “on account of his religious belief, he refused to accept the oath of allegiance.” Interestingly, it was the

\textsuperscript{49} Biography of I. Shakotko, 2.
\textsuperscript{50} Biography of I. Shakotko, 3.
\textsuperscript{51} Biography of I. Shakotko, 3.
pattern later used by generations of Evangelical believers in the USSR, even in the absence of any CO legislation.\textsuperscript{52}

In 1902 he married a second-generation Evangelical Christian young lady, Ekaterina Bogdashevskaia, “the daughter of a colporteur in the time of Count Korf and Pashkoff” (the Canadianized spelling Katherine Bohdasheffsky appears in the original of the biography). As most Stundists prior to the legalization of 1905, Shakotko was arrested for holding or participating in unlawful assemblies of believers. This eventually led Ivan to a decision to emigrate. “A tide of persecution was again raging against the Christians, and many of them seeking refuge and freedom of religion, began to migrate to other lands where such freedoms could be found. After much consideration and prayer, Ivan, his wife, his mother-in-law and her children left Russia bound for the North American continent.”\textsuperscript{53} Ivan and his family left Russia shortly before the religious toleration law of 1905 was enacted. The biography recalls Ivan’s amazement with Canadian personal and civil liberties: “In the new land, Ivan was amazed at the great freedom. His marriage was recognized as legal, and there was no further need of passports. Arriving in Winnipeg, he found it difficult to find work, not realizing the language was a barrier. However, he applied to a tailor shop in Winnipeg, and worked for a time without pay in order to show what he could do. A permanent position was soon secured, and he attended evening classes for immigrants which were taught by Reverend Paterson, a Baptist pastor.”\textsuperscript{54} Fascination with personal, political and religious freedoms in the new country seems to be a recurring

\textsuperscript{52} While an outward refusal to comply with the draft would inevitably earn one a prison term, a refusal to take the oath and receive military training usually led to a conscript’s placement into one of the labour units within the Soviet Army. Thousands of Soviet Evangelicals took up this road in order to reconcile their conscience with the demands of the government. The CO status and relevant legal provisions were erased from the Soviet legislation in 1936, and reinstated in the Russian Federation only as of 01 January, 2004.

\textsuperscript{53} Biography of I. Shakotko, 4.

\textsuperscript{54} Biography of I. Shakotko, 5.
theme among many Russian religious migrants of the period.\textsuperscript{55} This seems to be intertwined with the idea of New Jerusalem as a political reality discussed in the previous chapter. As Smillie noticed, one of the ideas that shaped Protestantism in the Prairies was “the doctrine of two kingdoms, the heavenly... and the earthly which gave Christians a heavenly goal while living as “pilgrims and strangers on earth.”\textsuperscript{56} Considering the similarity between Slavic Protestants and the Canadian Protestant mainstream, discussed in the previous chapter, this remark should apply to both. Of course, Shakotko was mindful of this dichotomy. Yet, he undoubtedly perceived his migration to Canada as a step towards the heavenly city of God.

The biography does not specify the year of their departure, but Ivan was already ordained a Baptist minister on May 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1905 by Rev. John MacNeil in the First Baptist Church of Winnipeg, Manitoba. That church belonged to the Baptist Union of Western Canada. The First Baptist Church extended their help to a handful (about fifteen) Russian-Ukrainian Protestant newcomers. It is unclear whether the original affiliation of the nucleus of the church was predominantly Russian Baptist, or Evangelical, or undefined (e.g. unaffiliated Stundists or Maliovantsy). In all probability it was mixed, but the small group apparently realised that it was in their best interest at that time to act and grow under the aegis of the large, wealthy, and benevolent Anglo-Canadian church.

Shortly after his appointment as a missionary, Shakotko moved to the Doukhobor

\textsuperscript{55} Compare M. Muratov, “Pereselenie novoizrael’tian (Emigration of New Israelites)” in \textit{Ezhemesiachnyi Zhurnal}, Petrograd, (2) 1916. Members of the Russian New Israelite sect, who immigrated to Uruguay in 1913, were bewildered by the approachability of Uruguayan officials, including the local governor, who “wanders around in a cart as Gypsies do back in Russia.”

village of Petrofka near Blain Lake in Saskatchewan with the approval of the Baptist missionary board.\textsuperscript{57} Carl Tracy noticed that the teacher at a Doukhobor school at Petrofka during the first years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was some Hermann Fast, “a preacher among the Russian Baptists and Mennonites” who was critical of Verigin’s authoritarianism.\textsuperscript{58} The biography does not contain any details of his pioneer work among the Russian Doukhobors except that he “became acquainted with the condition of the new settlers in Saskatchewan, and was invited… to pioneer and spread the gospel in this province.” There is no reason to believe that there were any mass or group conversions of the Doukhobors to the Baptist faith. More likely, the relationship between Shakotko and the Doukhobors resembled that between the Doukhobors of Kamsack area and Benito, and the Benito Evangelicals. That is, there was certainly a bond of common culture, customs, and language, and, no doubt, a respect for each other’s beliefs and the way of life. Occasional conversion both ways (as with some Benito Doukhobors or the Pavlovtsy) did not worsen this generally positive attitude, for the freedom of individual conscience gained through much suffering was a treasured value among Russian sectarians in general. However, the marked difference between the anarchical radicalism of the Doukhobors with their contempt for written texts and education and the text-based, politically neutral position of the Evangelicals did not leave much space for common theological ground.

Shakotko’s subsequent work was conducted along the lines of the Western Baptist mission board among new immigrants. Ukrainians, most of them Catholics from Galicia, were arriving in great numbers, and preaching among them was Shakotko’s main concern.

\textsuperscript{57} The Doukhobor Genealogy website contains an interesting memoir on Petrofka during its early years told by Alex Bayoff of Saskatoon at \url{http://www.doukhobor.org/Petrofka.htm}. The village was inhabited by so-called Independent Doukhobors, a less authoritarian and more flexible wing of the movement. The memoir, among other things, mentions frequent visits to the village of Russian Molokans from California and Quakers which attests to a degree of religious openness and involvement of the villagers. On Petrofka see also Bill Barry, \textit{Ukrainian People Places} (Regina: Centax Books, 2001), 143.

\textsuperscript{58} Carl J. Tracie, \textit{Toil and Peaceful Life: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918} (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1996), 112-113.
The biography mentions considerable resistance to the Evangelical preaching by the Ukrainian Catholic believers and clergy by rival Protestant denominations, such as Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists. Ukrainian Catholics were particularly difficult to deal with:

In the same year [1907], Ivan moved into the vicinity of Borden [SK], where he obtained a homestead among the Ukrainian Catholics. Thus he planned to spread the gospel to the people there. He experienced a great deal of suffering those first years among the ignorant people. Many a time his life was in danger, and once in the night he was forced to flee and hide in the bush from fanatics who threatened his life. Immediately all the community was astir. The priest was called out, who frightened and threatened many. Nevertheless, Ivan was able to persuade people to leave their belief in the Roman Pope and accept Christ.59

As follows from the biography, in accordance with our findings in earlier chapters, practically none of Galician Ukrainians were Protestant at the moment of their arrival to Canada. The situation was different with those who came from “Russian” Ukraine, although this second stream of immigrants was negligible in size compared to Galicians. In 1907 a group of Baptists came from “the old country,” for which Shakotko was able to obtain homesteads near Blain Lake, Saskatchewan. Later he repeatedly visited them as an itinerant preacher. In 1914 Ivan and his family moved to the city of Saskatoon, which from then on served as a centre of Shakotko’s missionary trips, which included the entire province and adjacent areas of Manitoba. The biography specifically mentions Leduc, Alberta, Rabbit

59 Biography of I. Shakotko, 5.
Lake, Kleczkowski, Ardill Saskatchewan, and Overstone, Manitoba. As before, Shakotko’s work focussed heavily on the Slavic population. In 1917 he worked among Russian colonists (that is, effectively, immigrants from the Russian Empire) near Viceroy, Southern Saskatchewan, successfully counteracting Mormon and Adventist missionary efforts. In 1923 he went to visit a remote Ukrainian (that is, in all probability, Galician, or “Austrian”) settlement north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan: “The inhabitants of this place were entirely Ukrainian, who lived in poverty and led a low moral life. Nevertheless, after hearing the blessed message of the gospel of Christ, the meetings in private homes were overcrowded. When private homes were unable to accommodate the crowd, the trustees of a public school allowed them to gather there.” The biography stressed the importance of moral instruction carried out by Shakotko. Church members in good standing were expected to shun most sorts of worldly pleasure, such as visiting saloons, dancing, drinking alcohol, smoking, and even going to court. The latter seems to reflect the traditional Slavic Evangelical conviction, inherited from the German Mennonites and such Russian Spiritual Christian sectarians as the Molokans, to avoid oaths and any involvement with government sanctioned use of force.

Ivan Shakotko died in 1960 in Saskatoon, having survived his wife by almost twenty years. Ekaterina passed away in Detroit in 1941. The biography concludes with the following summary: “Thus was the life of pioneer missionary Ivan Shakotko in the sparely settled, undeveloped, wild prairies of Western Canada. He planted the seeds of the gospel in far off places, and ministered to immigrants to a new land, showing them the way of life to Christ. In spite of all hardships to himself and his long suffering wife,

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60 Biography of I. Shakotko, 6.
great happiness came to him because he served the Lord and was shepherd to His sheep.”

Reverend Ivan Shakotko’s biography may be confirmed and enriched by Kindrat’s book on Ukrainian Baptists in Canada. Ivan and his family were among the first Evangelical refuges from the Russian Caucasus and Ukraine who arrived in Winnipeg between 1900 and 1905. Shakotko’s extended family, that also immigrated to Canada, was quite large – it included Ekaterina, Ivan, their children, Ivan’s mother-in-law with her three sons. According to Kindrat, another Ukrainian, Mykyta Kryvets’kyi, was ordained as a minister along with Shakotko in 1905 in the First Baptist Church of Winnipeg. Shakotko was, for a short while (possibly less than a year) prior to his departure for missionary work in Saskatchewan, the first presbyter of the Ukrainian Baptist Church in Winnipeg, a fact omitted in the biography.

J.E. Harris extensively mentioned Shakotko’s activities in his history of Baptists in Western Canada. “Converted in Ukrainia [sic!], while working as a tailor, he [Ivan Shakotko] dared the dangers of preaching and leading others to Christ, for it was dangerous to do such a thing where the Greek Orthodox Church was long established and widely venerated.” According to Harris, Shakotko’s position, paid by the board, was “Home Missionary to Ukrainians in Saskatchewan.” As such, he was in charge of youth groups, Sunday schools, and even English as a second language classes for Ukrainians in Saskatoon, all this in addition to regular pastoral care of the Saskatoon church numbering

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61 Biography of I. Shakotko, 6.
62 Kindrat, The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada, 42.
63 Kindrat, The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada, 42.
64 Kindrat, The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada, 43.
65 Kindrat, The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada, 43.
between eighty and one hundred members. Harris explained why Ekaterina, Ivan’s wife, died in Detroit: “In 1930 Shakotko resigned from his position with the Baptist Union to be pastor of a Russian [Baptist] church in Detroit.” Apparently, he returned to retire in Saskatoon some time after the death of his wife in 1941.

Vadim Kukushkin’s brief story of Ivan Shakotko within his discussion of the Protestant mission among Slavs in Canada is based on the data obtained from Canadian Baptist Archives and Year Books of the Baptist Union of Western Canada. Ivan Shakotko’s official appointment, according to these sources was “missionary to the Russo-Ukrainian people of the West.” As a salaried missionary, he “preached to Doukhobor, eastern Ukrainian, and Ruthenian [or Galician] farmers (some of them already Baptist converts) in Eagle Creek, Canora, Rosthern, Blain Lake, Lizard Lake, and other settlements.”

Kindrat mentioned Shakotko’s work among families from Russia near Radisson, west of Saskatoon, but said that “mainly immigrants from Galicia settled in that area.” As a Baptist minister, and a paid worker of the Baptist missionary board, he worked where his input seemed most useful. Of course, considering the fact that Galicians outnumbered “Russian” Ukrainians by far, his work within the Slavic immigrant community had to be focussed upon the Galician settlers, although Shakotko and other early Evangelical refugees were not themselves Galicians. Only later, after the Prokhanovite Union was established as a strong and vital church union (1909), did it

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67 Harris, *The Baptist Union of Western Canada*, 188.
68 Harris, *The Baptist Union of Western Canada*, 188.
70 Kukushkin, *From Peasants to Labourers*, 154.
71 Kindrat, *The Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada*, 46.
become possible for Slavic Evangelical settlers to maintain their independent church structures such as the Russian-Ukrainian community in Benito. Such communities maintained their multi-ethnic character free of any specific narrow ethnic agenda, and their Evangelical outreach independently of the auspices of English-speaking churches. However, due to the timing and circumstances of the moment, it was not an option for Ivan Shakotko. There is no reason to think that Shakotko felt constrained in his work with the Canadian Baptists or the Galician majority. He was a person of integrity and remarkable personal strength, happy to serve his immigrant brethren, irrespective of their ethnicity or former nationality, with sacrifice and selflessness. The life of Ivan Shakotko, as compared against experiences of later Evangelical settlers of Benito, reflects the new options that emerged for Slavic religious immigrants after the establishment of the Evangelical Union. In any case, Ivan Shakotko promoted through his work the truly inclusive spirit of the Slavic Evangelical movement, with no regard to any nationalist or political agenda. He acted within the great tradition that united St. Petersburg Evangelicals Pashkov, Korff, and Prokhanov with Ukrainian Stundist pioneers Riaboshapka, Tsymbal, and Ratushnyi.

**Conclusion**

Both texts share in common their purpose as historical and exemplary texts. Although not meant as histories *sensu stricto*, they attest to the realities of the routine life of an Evangelical believer in the Russian Empire and in the new land in the late 19th – early 20th century. The texts do not contain anything radically new from the historical point of view. Rather, they add a personal and intimate dimension to the historical facts
we are aware of, thus contributing to our understanding of the history ‘from inside out.’ At the same time both were written with a purpose to teach the readership an ethical lesson. They exposed what it took to be steadfast, patient, and faithful. Both texts were written with the specific intention of influencing the readership.

This, of course, makes them less surprising, if not less genuine, than the type of texts analysed by Royden Loewen. The latter included mainly diaries and correspondence, initially written for private use or a very limited readership. According to Loewen, the diaries he studied generally fall into one of the two categories – a travelogue (an account of a trip, usually the transatlantic migration history), and the private diary usually authored by those who “lived in a more urbanized world.”72 Although there are certainly elements of a travelogue in both biographies, they still have a less spontaneous and a more formal character than the Mennonite diaries studied by Loewen. Diaries and the private correspondence of early Slavic Evangelical settlers are yet to be discovered. We have not gained access to pieces of this sort during the field work in Benito, but collecting and analyzing them would be a logical next step towards the goals set by the present study. Hopefully, such research will be possible in the future.

The life stories of both Feoktist Dunaenko and Ivan Shakotko are perfect expositions of the motivations, moving forces and the background that stood behind the immigration of Slavic Evangelical believers to Canada in the beginning of twentieth century. It shows that religious considerations were the main reasons for their immigration to Canada. Both genetically and typologically their motives for immigration belong to the old and recurring biblical pattern of the pursuit of New Jerusalem, the search for a land of freedom, and the spiritual significance of wandering. This can be

72 Loewen, From Inside Out, 7.
defined as a particular rhetorical topos which is hard to overestimate while considering the self-identity of Slavic Evangelical immigration into Canada. Dunaenko’s and Shakotko’s cases show that Slavic Evangelical Christians were a distinctive group of religious settlers in Canada, different from the majority of the Ukrainian or Russian immigrants to this country. This identity issue may appear to be not so obvious for an outside observer who in the vast majority of cases is unaware of a complex web of factors behind it. However, it is very real to anyone who examines this type of immigrants in depth and looks beyond such impersonal factors as place of birth, native language, or the nationality of origin.

This allows for a comparison between Slavic Evangelicals in Western Canada and more famous distinctly religious groups, such as Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors. The three mentioned religious bodies are widely recognized in the scholarship and in public opinion as important streams of religiously motivated early settlers that helped to shape the cultural and religious mosaic of Western Canada. The cases of Feoktist Dunaenko and Ivan Shakotko illustrate that Slavic Evangelicals are another group of essentially the same sort.
Illustration I. Feoktist Dunaenko and his family before their return from exile.
Conclusion

The story of the Benito church cannot be evaluated or even told properly without placing it in the context of the larger church body that Benito willingly chose to be a part of. Indeed, the life of the Benito congregation was almost a mirror reflection of the developments that were taking place within the broader community of the Slavic Evangelical Christians in Canada and beyond. Of course, some general factors contributed to a shorter “life expectancy” of Benito compared to some other communities of the same denomination. The most powerful of these factors were the overall negative demographic dynamics in rural Canada, and a natural process of assimilation, accompanied by the gradual loss of the heritage language, mixed marriages, and a tacit shift in self-identification.

However, the primary moving forces behind the developments within the Benito church are to be sought not locally, or even nationally, but transnationally. To determine them, one should look at the larger movement of Slavic Evangelical Christians. This movement, in spite of its theological closeness with Russian and Ukrainian Baptists, sprang out of a different source. It was characterized by its ecumenical roots and perspective, stress on the social work and a broad reform coupled with a belief in its special mission for Russia and Slavic peoples and for Christendom in general.

Between 1905 and 1929 the Evangelical movement under the charismatic leadership of Ivan Prokhanov was among the strongest numerically and the fastest
growing Protestant denominations in Russia with very promising prospects.¹ History judged otherwise, and after a rapid and mighty revival of that period, Evangelical Christians entered the epoch of a decline and persecution. In 1944 a government ordered fusion with the Baptists in the USSR proclaimed the time of relative toleration while placing the life of the church under strict government surveillance.

In the meantime, the spiritual and, in part, administrative, since Ivan Prokhanov left the USSR in 1928, centre of the Slavic Evangelical movement shifted westward, to Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, and Central Europe. This shift chronologically coincided with the formation of the Benito church, initially founded by a handful of Ukrainian families from former eastern Poland. Then, after the atrocities and devastation of the war, the recarving of European borders and a drastic change of political regimes in most of Eastern and Central Europe, the focus of the Evangelical cause kept migrating westward, this time crossing the ocean. The late 1940s and 1950s were the peak years for the Slavic Evangelical movement in Canada in terms of its numbers and the range of activities.

The immigration experience had discernible religious overtones for many Slavic Evangelical Christians. In some cases religious persecutions or discrimination at home may have been the direct reason for immigration. However, more often the religious side of their migratory experiences meant that the process of migration was perceived as a pursuit of a religious, social and political ideal. This idea of New Jerusalem, inherently

¹ By the early 1920s there were about 250,000 Evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union, according to Walter Sawatsky, Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II (Kitchener, ON; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 27.
present in Christianity, is clearly distinguishable within the Slavic Evangelical vision.² Slavic Evangelicals perceived their new home in Canada as a place where their religious and political ideals converged, taking a shape of a godly political and social order. For many of them, their newly found freedom and security were true gifts from God. The very process of migration, within this paradigm, was sometimes perceived as a wandering for God’s sake.

The Evangelical project was a prophetic one. This does not mean that the members of the movement were guided by prophecies or prophets in the fashion of ancient Montanists or contemporary Charismatics. But the movement did depend upon the prophetic vision of its founders, from Vasilii Pashkov to Ivan Prokhanov, and the prophetic hope for a renewed Reformation, that would start in Russia and then embrace the world, uniting the like-minded in the spirit of love, converting unbelievers, erasing poverty, crime, and social vices, improving the economic conditions, and altogether transforming countries and nations. This vision was never realized in Russia or abroad. Prokhanov died in Berlin in 1935. The “second wave” of post-war Eastern European immigration, starting with the end of the World War II in 1945, revived the churches for a while, but the project was clearly failing. The large-scale reformation did not happen. The door to the USSR remained closed, while Evangelical Christians in the old country ceased to exist as a separate denomination after 1944. Russian and Slavic-speaking population worldwide did not massively convert to Evangelical Christianity. These transnational effects were felt by the Benito community, and played the major role in its decline.

The Slavic Evangelical movement could endure for a longer time where conditions were less adverse, for example, in large urban centres such as Chicago or Toronto, with considerable Slavic population, and at least some influx of Protestant Slavic immigrants even during the Cold War era. In rural northern Manitoba, demographic resources were limited and constantly shrinking due to reasons beyond the control of the Evangelical community. At that, Slavic Evangelical communities abroad increasingly felt effects of assimilation. Other ethno-religious communities of the region, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors, faced the same type of difficulties.

The Benito congregation was a part of a bigger unified body. This body, the Fellowship of the Slavic Evangelical Christians, was first and foremost a religious community. Also, it was an immigrant community, which represented a multi-ethnic, yet a culturally and religiously homogenous denominational unity. In this Slavic Evangelical Christians are similar to Mennonites, another immigrant community, capable of uniting members of different backgrounds (e.g. “Swiss” and “Russian” Mennonites) under one religious and cultural umbrella. This allows us to identify both Slavic Evangelicals and Mennonites as ethno-religious groups, distinct from most immigrants into Canada who, in most cases, could be classified separately along ethnic or religious lines. Mennonites underwent a thorough process of transformation starting from 1940s, and, as a result, re-emerged as a diversified community, accommodated to the environment, but not assimilated.

The Slavic Evangelicals bore a significant resemblance to another Slavic group of religious settlers, the Doukhobors. Both groups had much in common in terms of their language, material culture and traditions. Yet, much like Mennonites, most Canadian
Doukhobors in the post-war period accommodated to the dominant society while maintaining their identity and a sense of a communal cohesion.

In contrast to Mennonites and Doukhobors, who largely took up the path of accommodation to the surrounding culture without losing their identity, culture, or group cohesiveness, Slavic Evangelicals quietly assimilated. The lost prophetic momentum could no longer sustain the movement, and its members lost their specific ethno-religious identity. Their response to a similar set of challenges was not to regroup and reshape, even at the expense of an internal fragmentation or abandoning some of their lifestyle distinctiveness. Rather, Slavic Evangelicals as a distinct ethno-religious group melted down and became indistinguishable from the dominant culture.

Unlike many immigrants from Eastern Europe of the time, Slavic Evangelicals fitted very well into the Canadian Protestant mainstream. Theologically and practically their doctrine and church life did not differ significantly from the evangelical wing of Canadian Protestantism. They, like evangelicals elsewhere, possessed characteristically evangelical distinguishing features of conversionism, evangelical activism, biblicism, and a focus on the redemptive work of Christ as a central point of faith. Consequently, Slavic Evangelicals generally followed the pattern of development common for other Canadian evangelicals. These commonalities included, but were not limited to, the Bible school movement that swept Canadian evangelicalism especially in the 1930s and 40s, Christian radio broadcasting, the growing transdenominational awareness and participation in large joint missionary projects in the sphere of home and foreign mission and charitable

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undertakings. Along with Canadian Protestantism the Benito church experienced its numerical and activity peak in the late 1940s and 1950s. Inadvertently, the high level of integration into the Canadian evangelical milieu led to the accelerated blurring of boundaries between Slavic Evangelical Christians and other like-minded movements and churches.

The Benito Russian-Ukrainian church of Evangelical Christians had the distinction of serving as a joint church home for a few ethnic groups, nevertheless possessing a high degree of cultural and linguistic affinity. From the early years of the existence of the community there were Ukrainians (a clear majority), Russians, and Belorussians among its members. Anyone who observes the life of the Ukrainian Canadian community will note that this large and well-established group has a rich network of cultural, educational, religious, and other institutions across the country at its disposal. This is coupled with a fair share of political influence on a national and, particularly, on a provincial level in areas where Ukrainian Canadians comprise a significant percentage of voters. The cases when Ukrainian Canadians and Russian Canadians together maintain joint communal institutions are rare. The Russian-Ukrainian church in Benito, along with other communities of Evangelical Christians, was an infrequent exception.

This happened mainly because most early Ukrainian immigrants in Canada historically came from Galicia, the western part of the present-day Ukrainian state, incorporated into Ukraine thanks to Stalin’s annexation of the eastern part of Poland in 1939. Earlier the territory had been part of Austro-Hungary for well over a century till 1918, and before then – of the Polish Kingdom for a few centuries. Orthodox inhabitants
of Galicia abandoned the religion of their forefathers and entered a union with Rome in 1596 when Galicia was under Polish and Catholic rule. This established a marked cultural difference between Catholic Ukrainians in Galicia and the rest of Orthodox peoples, including Orthodox Ukrainians. Of course, these differences could, in some sense, be alleviated in Canada where they naturally lost their old context and became less relevant. Nevertheless, the decision of the Benito church to join the Prokhanovite church in Canada as a “Russian-Ukrainian” church, and not one of the mostly Galician Ukrainian Baptist churches reflected that cultural distinction rooted in the political and religious history of the region.

Members of many immigrant groups in the late 19th and early 20th century had to undergo a difficult process of adaptation, but there is a drastic difference regarding the amount of their tension or conflict with the Canadian authorities (federal or provincial) and population in general. Doukhobors were a group that has had by far the most troubled history in their relationship with Canada. Mennonites had a fair share of misunderstanding and tension with the authorities and neighbours over the issue of communal landholding, attending state schools, and pacifism, but the tension hardly ever amounted to open conflict. Slavic Evangelicals, remarkably, managed to avoid tension with either the government or their Canadian neighbours.

So what are the criteria by which we can determine the extent of the conflict between different religious immigrant groups and the Canadian state? William Janzen suggests paying special attention to four specific areas of possible tension: “a significant number of people in these groups have sought communal landholding systems, special arrangements for the education of their children, exemption from military service, and
certain modifications in welfare-state matters.”⁵ All of the mentioned issues required certain concessions that the Canadian government was not always ready to grant. Likewise, religious immigrant communities needed to seek reconciliation of their ways and practices with the Canadian law and reality. The amount and character of the required concessions on one side, and the willingness of the parties to make them, on the other side, determined the extent of the tension and its outcome. This also determined different patterns of conflict and its settlement.

Slavic Evangelicals were a group that displayed the highest degree of conformity with the law, and demanded no concessions from the state. This was quite natural, given that they professed a religion that fit well into the Canadian religious mainstream. Although historically and theologically Protestantism in Russia was connected and indebted to the Mennonites to an even greater degree than to European or North American Evangelicals, Slavic Evangelicals were in many ways a more modern, capitalist, more democratic, and less traditionalist religious groups than Anabaptists were. In terms of the four areas where communal groups expected concessions from the government, none of those areas was a concern for Evangelical Christians. They did not seek communal landholding, and accepted homesteads and land owning on government terms, although they tended to settle near to each other whenever possible. They did have church Sunday schools with instruction in Ukrainian and Russian, but never resisted the established system of compulsory schooling in Canada. They paid all due taxes and saw nothing wrong in using the benefits of the Canadian welfare system. Their ethnicity, the language barrier and cultural peculiarities made them different from the majority of

⁵ William Janzen, Limits on liberty: the experience of Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor communities in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 1.
Canadians. Those differences gradually vanished as over generations, English gradually replaced the heritage languages, and cultural differences disappeared. Slavic Evangelicals did not significantly differ from other evangelicals in Canada in terms of their doctrine, practice, or lifestyle. This inevitably led to the washing away of the distinctiveness of the group and its rapid assimilation into the Canadian mainstream, a process that by now is almost complete. They, even in the old country, usually accepted different forms of civil service, and, albeit unwillingly, declared fulfilment of the military obligation a private matter of the individual believer. 

In Canada where obtaining exemption from the military service in general did not represent such a dramatic experience as back home, Evangelical Christians chose not to pursue any special conditions or a recognized status as a peace church.

One of the areas of tension the Slavic Evangelical Christians experienced while in Canada was within their respective ethnic groups that belonged to traditional religions (Orthodoxy or Catholicism). The autobiography of one of the first Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical settlers in the Canadian West, Feoktist Dunaenko, and Ivan Shakotko’s biography give a few examples of such conflicts. Some members of their ethnic groups sometimes regarded Slavic Evangelicals as “traitors,” and not “truly” Ukrainian or “truly” Russian.

The life of the Benito church was in some ways similar to that of a person. Many people, no matter how worthy they were, are forgotten a generation or two after their death. This is a natural course of events. Yet, we remember others for many years, learning from their life stories. There is certainly something in the Benito story that

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makes it unique and worthy of being recorded and preserved for generations to come. The movement of the Slavic Evangelical Christians founded and led by Pashkov, Korf, and Prokhanov already largely belongs to history. So does the presence of the Evangelical Christians as a religious body in the Canadian Prairies. However, their history, their prophetic impulse, their determination to survive and succeed, their ecumenical spirit and tolerance make them stand out. Hopefully, this research will contribute to the preservation of the history and heritage of the church in the valley.
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