

BAPTIZM I BAPTISTY (SOTSIOLOGICHESKII OCHERK). Edited by M. Ia. Lensu and E. S. Prokoshina. Minsk: "Nauka i tekhnika," 1969. 320 pp. 1.23 rubles.

The present volume is another in the growing number of Soviet works produced in the past decade to explore the causes of the continued vigor of religion in a society whose dominant ideology is committed both to belief in the inevitable withering away of religion and to aggressive antireligious work. It is the most informative of those studies devoted to the Baptists, or, in Soviet parlance, "Baptism." The writers belong to what might be called "the Mitrokhin-Klibanov sociopsychological school" of scientific atheism which takes a more multifaceted and generally a more scholarly approach to the study of sectarianism than earlier Soviet Marxist writers did.

The book is the product of on-the-spot observations and personal interviews—supported by research in archival materials—which were conducted by sociologists from the Belorussian Academy of Sciences. The result is the most complete profile of Baptist believers in a single region of the USSR that has appeared in print. Because it is "most typical for Belorussia in number of Baptists," the Minsk Oblast was chosen as the focus of study; it is also representative of the republic in that it includes territory that was part of prewar Poland. The sample for interviews comprised 10 percent of all Baptists in the oblast, or 351 persons.

The first sixth of the book—the most objective part—presents the history of "Baptism" in Belorussia along with demographic statistics. The history is traced from its beginnings in the 1870s, with the movement's origins interpreted as a phenomenon of social protest. As is all too frequent in Soviet studies of religious groups, virtually no information is given about Baptist life in Soviet Belorussia between 1929 and 1941, although considerable data from city archives are used to detail the history of "Baptism" in that area under Poland during this period. Present-day Baptist congregations are described in terms of age and sex, and occupational, social, and educational composition. Unfortunately, in reporting statistics about the Baptists the writers have made little comparison with society at large. In a tentative fashion it appears from the study that the average age of the Baptists is slightly higher than that of members of society around them, but there is relatively no difference in the other categories listed.

The major portion of the book is devoted to an examination of Baptist opinion on various subjects: science, morals, labor, culture, education, and the like. The information offered here is based primarily on interviews, many of which are reproduced in useful excerpts. On the whole, however, this part of the volume is marred by constant refutation of Baptist ideas from Marxist premises. The thrust of the argument is the not very novel assertion that despite the Baptists' praise of science and education, their exemplary moral conduct, and their diligence in labor, they are essentially subversive to the socialist system, because their values, though appearing to coincide with Marxist values, are thoroughly unscientific.

All in all, the present volume is a significant piece of scientific-atheistic scholarship and offers encouraging evidence of the existence in Belorussia of extensive archival and research materials for the study of the Baptists. We can only hope that similar studies of quality will be forthcoming from the academies of sciences of the other republics, and even more, that it may become possible for Western scholars also to have access to the primary materials.

PAUL D. STEEVES
University of Kansas