

IN THE CAULDRON OF RUSSIA

(Review of the book by Ivan S. Prokhanoff)

The Bible tells the story of an Ethiopian eunuch baptized by Phillip the evangelist ((Acts 8:28-40). This “foreigner” was baptized into Jesus Christ. The Lord added him to His Body. He did not become a part of any denomination, he merely became a Christian. Throughout the long history of Christianity, there have always been people just like the Ethiopian eunuch. These people belonged to the Lord and to no one else. Jesus has never been a Head without a body, a Shepherd without sheep, or a King without subjects.

Ivan S. Prokhanoff was just such a man. He was born April 17, 1869 in the province of Caucasus and the city of Vladikavkas. That same year an evangelical movement began in Russia that ultimately numbered over two million believers. Following his baptism in the river Terek at the age of 18, Prokhanoff became a leader in this movement. He suffered greatly for his faith, was imprisoned twice, but was faithful until death. He wrote this book about his struggles in 1933, two years before his death. The book was out of print for 60 long years, but was reprinted in 1993. The book is available through the ONE BODY MINISTRIES, P.O. Box 645, Joplin, Mo. 64802-0645.

The first Christian martyrs were victims of religious persecution. Religious leaders like Caiaphas, Annas, and Saul of Tarsus persecuted unto death those who dared to differ. The same happened in Russia. According to the fundamental laws of the Empire, it was forbidden for any man to have religious convictions differing from Orthodox Church dogmas, or to separate from the church. Proselytizing was a crime.

You are aware, I’m sure, that in 1917 the Bolsheviks took over Russia and millions died. The church, however, continued to grow. The “evangelicals” were seen as a threat to the Orthodox

church and in 1921 Prokhanoff suffered his first imprisonment. Just as in Bible times, it was the result of religious persecution. An Orthodox priest, also a part of the Cheka (the dreaded revolutionary political police) was responsible. He reported that Prokhanoff was actually conducting secret counter revolutionary work. In the spirit of Christ, Prokhanoff wrote: *“Although V. was guilty of our arrest by his false charges, nevertheless we forgive him in the Name of Him who forgave us”*

His second arrest came in April 1923. The Cheka came at midnight and meticulously searched his house. Though not immediately arrested he was ordered to come “voluntarily” to the main Cheka office in Moscow. Upon his arrival he was thrust into an “inner prison” and fed starvation rations. In the morning they had water and two pieces of sugar. At noon fish bone soup. In the evening a proso pudding made from common grain. Prokhanoff comforted a fellow prisoner by saying: *“First of all, this is the will of God, which is always good, whether we have something pleasant or unpleasant. Secondly, it is a great honor to be where Christ and the Apostles were centuries ago”.*

Looking back over his life he wrote: *“Yes, all things, including my arrests, worked for good in our labor of spreading the Gospel in Russia through the Evangelical movement. Greek Orthodoxy, Revolution, atheism and bolshevism alike plowed the soil of Russia, but they could not sow the seed which brought forth fruit unto righteousness. The messengers of the Gospel were the sowers, and the sowing is even now being followed by a glorious harvest. So I say: Glory be to Him who alone doeth wondrous things for even what the evil men would do was transformed into good.”*

The story of believers thriving in Russia in spite of atheism and persecution is inspiring beyond words. When Elijah thought he was the only man standing for truth he was discouraged. He was encouraged, however, when God revealed to him that there were 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal or

kissed his image.

May the courage of our Russian brethren also be an encouragement to us!