

The Conflict in the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists: 1959-1963

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The split in the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, which was in the wind in the late 1950s and finally took place in 1963 at the All-Union Congress, in many respects was accelerated by the AUCECB's adoption of two documents—the Regulations on the Union of EBC and the Instructional Letter to Senior Presbyters. The purpose of this article is not to present a chronological description of all the events of 1959-1963; rather it is an attempt to analyze the causes of those events and the activities of the conflicting parties as a whole.

Considering why the two controversial documents appeared (the Regulations and the Instructional Letter), one should note that at that time the AUCECB was under severe pressure from the Soviet government. Probably the leadership of the AUCECB had several motives. Above all they attempted to preserve the Union of ECB communities in one form or another and to retain power. The desire to retain power need not necessarily be caused by selfish ends or ambitions (although they should not be discounted either). Being under the powerful pressure of the atheistic state, the AUCECB leadership had gained some experience in balancing between the demands of the authorities and the beliefs of the faithful. Probably, in their opinion, if more radical leaders came to power, the state of evangelicals in the USSR would only worsen.

The AUCECB tried to suppress the emerging discontent at the local level (caused by the fact that Union leadership made absolutely unjustified concessions to the authorities), making it clear that the situation was not so simple and that the faithful at the local level were just not able to understand the conditions under which the AUCECB and



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senior presbyters had to work.¹

Analyzing the text of the Instructional Letter, we can assert that along with unjustified concessions (for example, restricting youth from attending church) there were several items that would be called sound at any other time. This relates, for example, to the item prescribing that the senior presbyter continuously improve his cultural level and fight wrong attitudes to literature, art, and other spheres of culture.

At that time, in the opinion of some believers, it sounded like a call to be conformed to the world. The point-blank rejection of any form of literature or art becomes more understandable if we take into account the fact that in the USSR those spheres were extremely ideological. Even the top government official—Nikita Khrushchev—was bold enough personally to set creative tasks for poets, writers, film directors, etc. Keeping in mind that the government in the form of the Communist Party was proclaiming atheistic activities on the one hand, and, on the other, was directing Soviet art, one can understand the reluctance of some believers to acknowledge any art at all.

The Instructional Letter, as well as all activities of the AUCECB, seemed to show the authorities that Evangelical Christians-Baptists are not a marginal sub-culture. For example, clause 3 of the section “On members of the congregation” stated that they are like any other citizens of the coun-

try and are obliged to work and live honestly. Again, it showed the necessity of getting rid of tunnel vision concerning art, literature, cinema, etc.

One gets the impression that the AUCECB could not come to a decision regarding many issues and therefore their actions often did not look very understandable or logical. For example, the status of the Instructional Letter does not seem quite clear. Sometimes it was presented as advice and recommendations, and sometimes as an order. A similar uncertainty was evident in the course of the congress in 1963, when the very word “congress” emerged only in the course of the proceedings, although it had initially started as a consultation meeting. A similar inconsistency can be found in several publications of the AUCECB. For example, in his article “On the ministry of the senior presbyter,” N. A. Levindanto, in trying to substantiate the necessity and “canonicity” of the senior presbyter’s office, writes very ambiguously about whether this office is elective or appointive: “Senior presbyters are to be appointed from the most worthy and experienced figures of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood... In fact, they are elected ministers, since, prior to being appointed to this work, each of them has been elected in his community to the presbyter’s office.”²

There is a well-worn expression that the severity of Russian laws is compensated for by the optional nature of compliance to them. When analyzing various speeches of A. V. Karev, the AUCECB General Secre-

¹ See, for example, N. A. Levindanto’s article, “On the ministry of the senior presbyter,” *Bratskiy vestnik* No. 1, (1956): 48-52.

² *Ibid.*, 50.

tary at that time, we find that he spoke in a kind of Aesopian language. Perhaps at that time few of the presbyters could understand his hints (“we should not demand the impossible,” “we do what we can at the present time,” etc.). These appeals have been kept in the AUCECB archive.³

At the same time, presbyters in several congregations, as was noted before, realizing the pressure under which the AUCECB had to work and understanding that they had to observe the law, continued to work as if nothing had happened. For example, historian Walter Sawatsky describes the situation when, on the one hand they had to give the floor to a visiting preacher, and on the other hand had to observe the law prohibiting it. Thus, the presbyter of the local church would invite the guest at the end of the meeting to share his greetings with the church. The man would then begin to present greetings from brothers and sisters, as well as to speak about some needs and concerns. Then he would present greetings from Paul, Peter, and Jesus. And, with a view to better understanding the words of Jesus, he would refer to one or another place from the Scripture, and, under the guise of greetings, would virtually preach.⁴

The official church authority represented by the AUCECB, as the AUCECB leaders themselves admit, having once made intolerable conces-

sions to the governmental authorities, drove itself into a corner. The concessions that seemed at first insignificant grew into the loss of control over the situation. As a definitely positive feature, one should note that the AUCECB leadership never tried to deny that they themselves contributed to the creation of the situation they got into. In the talk that took place in the AUCECB office with the representatives of the World Council of Churches on 23 March 1966, A. V. Karev called the Instructional Letter “a mirror of that time and condition.”⁵ It should be noted that A. V. Karev did not try to justify himself, but called things by their proper name. For example, in a talk with G. K. Kryuchkov, as the latter recalls, he said bluntly, “Once we allowed them to put a noose around our neck, and now with each day we are tightening it more and more.”⁶

As we recall the beginning of the Initiative Group’s activities and the first steps of their leaders, we cannot help but marvel at their courage and resoluteness. With no fear of any authorities, whether the AUCECB or the government, they decisively posed questions that troubled them, although they understood that such a courageous and active stand might lead many of them to imprisonment or even death. This is exactly what happened in the following years. For example, by 1984 the number of those sentenced to various terms of confine-

³ For example, Letter of the AUCECB No. 208, 29.01.1962, p. 2., Archive of RUECB, folder 32d47; Record of the talk between the MOECB with the community members that support the Organizing Committee, 04.10.1963, Archive of RUECB, folder 28d.3-3.

⁴ Walter Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR* (Moscow: Grant Publishing, no. 3-4), 31-32.

⁵ *Vestnik istiny* No. 1 (1982):26.

⁶ *Vestnik istiny* No. 3-4 (1981): 9.

ments and placed in mental hospitals totaled 163 (not counting those with conditional sentences).⁷

Nonetheless, the oppositionists clearly and openly stood for the purity of the gospel doctrine as they understood it; in other words, they were antagonistic to any compromises with the atheistic authorities. A characteristic expression of the expectations of that group of the faithful was a hymn that was wide-spread among the churches opposed to the AUCECB: "I don't want half-truth, I don't want half-purpose." A bold decision to advocate the gospel faith at any cost and an unwillingness to meet the authorities halfway are worthy of respect. The sheer fact of belonging to an unregistered ECB community was enough to start one worrying not only about one's career and well-being, but about one's own freedom and that of one's family. Fidelity to principles and the resoluteness of the Initiative Group and, eventually, the Organizing Committee and the churches that supported it, forced the AUCECB to react somehow to their actions and statements.

As one of the songs of the popular sixties poet and song-writer, Bulat Okudzhava, says, "It's truly a pity that sometimes the pedestals to our victories rise higher than the victories themselves." Although this song was written for a different reason, this line characterizes well what happened after the appearance of the Initiative Group. Indeed, by the begin-

ning of the sixties, the Soviet state had virtual control over the inner life of churches. But justified indignation against excessive concessions that were made by the AUCECB to the state gradually gave way to endless accusations against the AUCECB and the demand for repentance. A certain self-righteousness of the Initiative Group, the Organizing Committee and, eventually, the CCECB was reflected in their literature: *Bratski listok*, *Vestnik istiny* and numerous memoirs.

For example, G. K. Kryuchkov, in his article "20 let po puti vozrozhdeniia" ["Twenty years on the way to revival"], accuses the AUCECB on many points, but never recognizes a single mistake on the part of the Initiative Group.⁸ Analyzing the problems of relations with the AUCECB in his book *Po puti vozrozhdeniia* [*On the way to revival*], G. K. Kryuchkov says, "So, if we are asked: Did we do everything to reconcile the dispute? — We could with good reason declare, "Yes, everything."⁹ At the same time, judging by the records of the talks that took place in the AUCECB office and at the negotiations with representatives of the AUCECB noted above, one gets the impression that there were no attempts to settle the conflict on the part of the opposition. The opposition held conversation in a categorical manner, and this conversation consisted mainly of demands to the opposing party that they recognize their mistakes unilaterally.

Paradoxically, by accusing the AUCECB of fulfilling the KGB's will, the oppositionists themselves accomplished the goal that the government really pursued, namely to provoke a

⁷ According to the List of ECB Prisoners, 1984.

⁸ *Vestnik istiny* No. 3-4 (1981): 2-15.

⁹ G. K. Kryuchkov, *Po puti vozrozhdeniia* (Moscow: Khristianin, 1989), 21.

division among evangelicals. Later on, it was much easier for the government to fight religion in the face of two opposing church unions. The efficient use of the principle “divide and conquer” allowed the authorities to manipulate the contradictions and confrontation between the two evangelical churches. Thus, the leaders of the church opposition themselves, although against their own will, fulfilled the will of the government intelligence service.

In addition, there is one more unclear point. G. K. Kryuchkov himself constantly claimed that the government had deeply infiltrated the evangelical milieu and controlled the situation in the congregations. This position is contradicted by the fact that the formation of the Initiative Group (IG) by believers from the village of Uzlovaya (Tula *oblast*) was a bolt from the blue for the government. It is doubtful that the well-organized governmental authorities (including the KGB) would not have been aware of the questions discussed in ECB communities and would not have been able to take measures to nip in the bud any church opposition. Consequently, it is more likely that the IG organizers were cunning when they claimed that the IG was established at a general church meeting. It is more feasible that they assumed that function themselves. Either that or it really did happen with the broad participation of church members. In that case, however, one cannot help but suggest that the authorities simply did not want to prevent the incipient split in the ECB Union.

Besides, G. K. Kryuchkov himself, who was in hiding at different addresses, was in a somewhat different position compared to the laity that supported him. In particular, I. I. Motorin, a member of the AUCECB (1895-1974), wrote in a letter in 1963, “You write in your letter to the brothers and sisters: ‘Don’t be afraid of anything,’ ‘Come out courageously,’ and so on... But why don’t you put your address in letters, appeals, or magazines as the AUCECB does. Why are you afraid to do this?”¹⁰

The authorities built a Great Wall of China around the most active evangelicals, presenting them as people totally detached from life. But this wall, strange as it may seem, was being built from both sides. The churches on the side of the Organizing Committee and eventually of the Council of Churches also did their best to isolate themselves from “outsiders.”

There is no denying that the opposition was not always consistent in their activities. The principle of church autonomy, which was much talked about among the IG followers, was in the long run violated by themselves. For example, in Protocol No. 7, there is a gross violation of this principle caused by the excommunication of several ministers, although such a decision was within the competence of local churches. The utmost reluctance to deal with any “outsiders,” that is, secular organizations, resulted eventually in a quite close collaboration with several organizations, which included even appeals to the UN.

One cannot assert that theological issues were decisive in the ECB

¹⁰ I. I. Motorin to G. K. Kryuchkov, 1963.

Union's split. However, we should indicate the major theological issues that divided the leaders of the opposing parties. There were two such issues. The first is the problem of relations between the church and the state. Both sides emphasized different places in the Scripture when grounding their stand on this matter. The leaders of the IG and the Organizing Committee, as well as more radical believers, asserted that the church must first of all obey God, not the authorities.

This stand, of course, is rooted in Holy Scripture. For example, when the Sanhedrin tried to forbid the apostles to speak about the death and resurrection of Jesus, they refused to obey this demand: "Peter and the other apostles answered and said, 'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (Ac 5:29).

The problem of relations between church and state was posed by the IG leaders as the major issue in Christian history. In the Second Church Letter, the IG leaders Kryuchkov and Prokofyev interpret church history in the following manner. In the first centuries, the church remained faithful, pure, and separated from the world, and therefore, all attacks of Satan were futile. But then, as IG leaders maintain, the Pergamum period came, when Satan penetrated the church and submitted it to the secular authority of Constantine, who expelled true ministers during the Thyatiran period of church history. Kryuchkov and Prokofyev drew an analogy between those events and the situation of the Baptist church in the

USSR in the beginning of the sixties. They wrote that Satan used the same tactics of fighting the church (submitting it to secular authority) in the present situation.¹¹

At the same time, the AUCECB, when considering the principle of relations between the church and the state, emphasized other places in Holy Scripture:

For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you (Ro 13:3).

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king as the supreme authority... (1Pe 2:13).

Some provisions of the Instructional Letter were quite difficult to base on a biblical position, and therefore were rejected by the opposition. For example, the prohibition against gathering in homes set forth in the clause 2 of the section "On members of the congregation" contradicted several places in Holy Scripture, from which we know that the faithful of the early church did gather in homes. For example, having met with the presbyters on the way from Miletus to Jerusalem, Paul said:

...Serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now,

¹¹ Letter No. 2, 1961.

behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there (Ac 20:19-22).

This passage, as well as other places in the Bible (e.g., 1Th 2:9), indicated that Christians could preach in different congregations and not only in their own, which also did not conform to the requirements of the clause. In those dramatic years, the AUCECB leadership preferred not to emphasize those biblical examples where the faithful apparently violated prohibitions. This refers to home meetings, too. For example, the Acts say that the faithful did gather in homes when the Sanhedrin prohibited them to speak on behalf of Jesus.

They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and {then} released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Ac 5:40-42).

The point-blank rejection of any relations with the authorities on the part of the Organizing Committee grew into the reluctance to have anything in common with the "outer world." Up until now, the camp of the CCECB followers does not welcome education, taking care of one's health, and other "concessions to the world." They find the basis for this in the verses:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Ro 12:1-2).

We must acknowledge that the stand of the AUCECB, despite some intolerable concessions to the atheistic authorities, was in many ways quite reasonable, and what was seen by the opposition as conformity with the world was often a simple statement of fairly sound ideas. As an example, we can take the article "Derzhis' obraztsa zdravogo ucheniia" ["Stick to the model of sound teaching"] by A. Mitskevich published in *Bratskiy vestnik* in 1960. The article referred to the attitude of the believer to his civil duties, his health, and achievements of culture.¹²

Indeed, as we study Holy Scripture, we see, for example, that Paul not only was learned in Jewish culture and history, but also knew well the literature of his time. In Athens he said, "For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children'" (Ac 17:28). Here we see Paul quoting the early Stoic poet Arat. In the Letter to Titus, Paul quotes a local poet: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'" (Tit 1:12).

The AUCECB leaders' attitude to culture was different from that of the opposition leaders. A. Mitskevich

¹² A. Mitskevich, "Derzhis' obraztsa zdravogo ucheniia," *Bratskiy vestnik* No. 1 (1960): 52-55.

wrote, “Among us, unfortunately, we have some believers for whom all new and good things in the cultural sphere are alien. They are used to seeing everything earthly as sinful.”¹³ In this article, A. Mitskevich contrasted such manifestations of neo-Platonism (most apparent among the IG followers) to the necessity for the believer to study various subjects, particularly geography, history, and literature, which might help him to study the Bible better.

We can conclude that the biggest mistake of one party was opposing the authorities in cases where it was not necessary (for example, the rejection of registration when it became possible), whereas the biggest mistake of the other party was obeying in cases where one would probably have to be firmer.

The second major theological issue that relates directly to the split in the Union of ECB was an ecclesiological issue: what is the church? Systematic theology usually discerns two aspects of the church—the universal and the local.¹⁴ The Universal Church is not viewed as a denomination. Its head is Jesus Christ. It is precisely in this sense that the word *church* is used in the following passage: “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22-23).

Christ is declared head of the Universal Church: “He is also head of the

body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything” (Col 1:18).

The church is defined as His body: “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Ro 12:4-5).

The local church is defined as a group of Christians who jointly worship God in a certain locality. This is the context in which the word *church* is used in this passage: “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles” (KJV, Ac 8:1).

The leaders of the church opposition (IG, Organizing Committee) confused these two concepts. They viewed the church as something intermediate.¹⁵ It was neither the church in the universal nor in the local sense. This approach to the concept *local church* is more characteristic of Orthodoxy where the local church is usually understood as a national church. It was just this approach that gave the IG leaders the basis to excommunicate members of other local churches (for example, the leadership of the AUCECB). At the same time, it should be noted that AUCECB leaders, though not taking on themselves

¹³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁴ G. Tissen, *Lektsii po sistematicheskomu bogosloviiu* (St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 1994).

¹⁵ See S. N. Savinsky, *Istoriia Evangeli'skikh khristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii (1917-1967)*, (St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 2001), 221.

the function of excommunicating dissidents, were nonetheless trying to make local communities excommunicate dissidents *in situ*.

Besides the two aforementioned major theological issues on which the opposing parties had different opinions, there were other issues as well. The parties had different understandings of the meaning and main task of the service of worship. The IG followers emphasized the necessity of bringing the gospel regardless of the circumstances, and found reasons for that in the Bible, for example: "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'" (Mk 16:15).

In its turn, the AUCECB leadership emphasized that one had to discern the times when God opens the door and when He closes it. As was noted before, the third clause of the Instructional Letter states that the main task of worship is the satisfaction of the spiritual needs of the faithful, not evangelization. However, the AUCECB leadership indicated the temporary character of this step. In particular, the AUCECB Appeal to All Communities in the USSR of 29 January 1962, stated: "The Lord Himself creates these or those conditions for service to Him... And the AUCECB and all of its congregations do what they can, as Christ Himself said: 'Why do you bother her?... She has done what she could' (Mk 14:6-8)."¹⁶ The same message stressed that the current situation in the AUCECB, the Instructional Letter, and similar

things are not eternal; they could change, depending on the conditions and time: "A wise heart knows the proper time and procedure" (Ecc 8:5).¹⁷

Besides this, there were also disagreements between the parties concerning the issue of soteriology. Several decades later, at the Fiftieth Anniversary Congress of the Euro-Asian Federation of ECB in February 2004, in Moscow, the delegates received a document entitled "Ob uklonenii Soveta tserkvei" ["On the deviation of the Council of Churches from the doctrine of the ECB"]. In particular, this document stated that the Council of Churches does not acknowledge in practice salvation by faith and grace alone (Eph 2:8-9). Grace is supplemented by "child bearing, loyalty to the Council of Churches, persecutions from the world, etc. This is nothing less than a residue of the legalistic heresy exposed by Paul in his Letter to the Galatians!"¹⁸ This practice, as noted in the message, could not be acceptable to the Russian ECB leadership who signed this document. Having suffered persecutions from the authorities, the Initiative Group (Organizing Committee) followers began to insist increasingly on the necessity of persecutions from the world. And this gradually grew into a cult of suffering as a necessary condition of life both for the church and the individual believer.

The same document indicated another deviation from biblical doctrine that was practiced in the CCECB churches, namely the obligatory confession of sins in the presence of ministers as an essential condition for

¹⁶ The AUCECB Message No. 208, 1962, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ «Ob uklonenii STs...» 2004.

participating in the Eucharist. However, this practice appeared in the CCECB churches after the period covered in this paper.

Analyzing the theological positions of both sides in the conflict, we should note that both the AUCECB leaders and the Organizing Committee showed a lack of respect in dealing with such a branch of Bible studies as hermeneutics. This was primarily expressed in a quite liberal interpretation of biblical texts. For example, the Instructional Letter emphasized the necessity “to hold back unhealthy missionary activities.” In order to substantiate this position, the AUCECB leadership referred to Ro 10:12, indicating that Paul called “unhealthy missionary activities” a zeal that does not correspond to knowledge: “For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Ro 10:2). It should be noted that the quotation was apparently torn out of context. What Paul meant is first of all the zeal of Israel for keeping strictly the Law of Moses, and this verse is hardly relevant to the way it was used in the Instructional Letter. Here, as in other cases, the AUCECB simply utilized the Scripture to corroborate their instructions by tearing verses out of context.

The Organizing Committee manipulated the Bible in a similar manner. For example, their Declaration as of

11 October 1963 began with the words: “Let my soul not enter into their *council*...”¹⁹ (Ge 49:6). Genesis 49 narrates the prophesies in respect to the tribes of Israel. The Organizing Committee tried to associate this with the All-Union *Council* of the ECB who were conducting their congress and whose power was not recognized by the Organizing Committee.

As we consider this complicated and controversial period in the history of the Evangelical-Baptist movement in Russia, we conclude that the governmental authority used very aptly the disputes between the faithful, as well as their ambitions and vanity. As we see it, the AUCECB tried to repel accusations against Christians known from atheistic literature and tried to prove (e.g., on the pages of *Bratskiy vestnik*) that they did not destroy the unity of Soviet society and did not undermine it. The AUCECB tried to show that believers not only could be fully legitimate citizens of their country, but could be even more hard-working than others. Of course, this position was not welcomed by everybody. The same reaction was evoked by the apologists of the early church who maintained that Christians did not have to worship the emperor, but had to serve him, and the best way to do this was to pray for him and his empire to the true God.²⁰

At the same time we should note significant mistakes made by the AUCECB leadership. According to the discipline of conflict management, there are several models of behavior in conflict situations. The least productive is ignoring the conflict; that is, pretending that nothing has hap-

¹⁹ Highlighted by the author.

²⁰ Justo L. Gonzalez, *Istoriia khristianstva, tom 1: Ot osnovaniia tserkvi do epokhi reformatsii* (The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1), trans. B. A. Skorokhodov (St. Petersburg, Bibliia dlia vsekh, 2001; San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1984).

pened. At the beginning of the sixties the AUCECB, unfortunately, chose this way. Despite many questions, requests, and appeals, the AUCECB struggled to demonstrate that nothing was happening. Analyzing articles of *Bratskiy vestnik*, the AUCECB's official periodical of that period, we find the absence of any references to the dispute. From all appearances, the main reason for this was the underestimation of the opposition on the part of the AUCECB.

In church history, as in the life of an individual, we often have situations when we have to take responsibility and begin to act. Sometimes we have to show initiative and take the lead. Unfortunately, the AUCECB leadership was not always energetic when there was such a necessity. For that matter, a very characteristic example is the answer of A. V. Karev to the question of G. K. Kryuchkov during a meeting that took place in the AUCECB office on 26 November 1961. To the question of whether God is pleased with the aims of the Initiative Group, A. V. Karev answered, "Yes, God is pleased, brother, but if He is pleased to give us freedom, He will give us freedom without the struggle of the church."²¹

It should be noted that the AUCECB slowly achieved everything that the IG leaders insisted on, but this was hardly possible without strong pressure from the latter. Today, with hindsight, it is easier to see the mistakes made by the AUCECB leadership. Nonetheless, we must admit that only those who were at the

"very top" of the church administration were able to assess in full measure the complexity of the situation. A. V. Karev, as well as the entire AUCECB leadership, stood before a complex dilemma, aware that their decisions and actions were crucial for preserving the church, at least in the form that was possible at that moment. It is one thing to choose the way of persecutions and sufferings for yourself and another to lead thousands of people in this direction and be aware of what it might mean for them.

As we return to the developments in the movement that opposed the AUCECB, we should admit that what was initially demanded by the IG leaders they later trampled on themselves. The demands to follow impeccably all doctrinal points, first of all the principle of autonomy, resulted in a crude violation of them (excommunication of members of local churches). The demand for democracy and absence of censorship gave way to strict centralization and censorship. The outpost of the fight against sluggishness gradually turned into the stronghold of resistance to any innovation and reform. The point-blank non-recognition of any governmental authorities and blaming the AUCECB for "flirting" with the authorities went side by side with their own affirmations of loyalty to the government. For example, a group of believers from Kiev in their letter addressed to the AUCECB and the Council for Religious Affairs wrote, "We affirm that we will pray and make all efforts for the flourishing of our Motherland, for the prosperity of

²¹ Savinskiy, *Istoriia Evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov*, 350.

our people...”²² In the Supplement to the Report of the Organizing Committee of 22 September 1962, we find a call to return to the beginnings of the legal relations between the church and the state. This document even uses quotations from V. I. Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state.²³

The choice of the survey period (1959-1963) in the beginning of this paper is determined by the fact that after the Congress of 1963 the stands of both parties were clearly stated, and the further development of the two unions was outlined. After the AUCECB directly accused the Organizing Committee of schism and the Organizing Committee excommunicated the AUCECB members, it was clear that things went too far, and no revision in documents and the Regulations would reconcile the parties. Since that time, the faithful had to choose the stand of one of the parties. Despite the fact that many of the opposition's suggestions were taken into account in the new Regulations, by January 1965, 283 churches and groups joined the opposition with 8,686 people, and during 1965 twenty more groups quit the AUCECB, with a total of 1,329 believers.²⁴

There was a reverse process as well. After the congress the Presidium of the AUCECB was able to assist in registering unregistered churches. Also, the enlarged Plenum of the AUCECB that took place in September 1964 was devoted to the question of

unity. The Plenum's documents noted that the AUCECB continued to work to achieve unity and did much to strengthen ties with unregistered churches.²⁵ Many of those who had recently opposed the AUCECB were present at this Plenum, in particular, V. F. Vasilenko from Vinnitsa *oblast'*, who was appointed senior presbyter.

The analysis of these events makes it possible to conclude that both parties made many mistakes. One can even say that the stand of the church opposition in the initial period of confrontation was to some extent more honest and grounded. Afterwards, the dynamics of the development of both unions were different. One can say that the followers of the IG, the Organizing Committee and, eventually, the CCECB increasingly blamed the AUCECB for what had happened and presented themselves as the only fighters for the purity of the faith. At the same time, despite any changes in the Soviet Union or even its collapse, they have not changed their line of isolation from the authorities, which at times looks like isolation from society. Incidentally, after many of the CCECB members left for the West (e.g., Germany), they continued the same policy of self-isolation. In contrast to this, the stand of the AUCECB (and later, RCECB) gradually changed, and they began to recognize their mistakes and correct them. Unfortunately, one must admit that, in today's post-communist Russia, people still seek for those guilty of the ordeals that fell to the lot of Russians over the last decades. The tension in the country's political life is determined by the fact that some political

²² Letter, 1962.

²³ Supplement to the report, 1962.

²⁴ *Istoriia EKKhB v SSSR* (Moscow: AUCECB, 1989), 245.

²⁵ *Bratskiy vestnik* No. 6 (1964), 41.

parties or even groups of people try to lay responsibility on other groups. Some accuse communists, others accuse democrats. Some blame foreigners; some blame simply those with a different opinion. One can assert that society has not experienced what can be called repentance. Alas, we do not see it in the church either. Both sides in the conflict still insist on the mistakes made by the opposing party.

The advocates of the CCECB consider themselves the only ones who “stand in truth.” Regarding the position of the AUCECB, we can say that despite the recognition of their mistakes some of their announcements and publications are still confusing. For example, the appeal that was disseminated on behalf of the RCECB at the Fiftieth Anniversary Congress of the Euro-Asian Federation of ECB, among other accusations against the CCECB, included an accusation of partiality. This accusation was quite relevant. However, it was accompanied by attacks against the personality of G. K. Kryuchkov himself, since he allegedly did not meet the requirements imposed by the Bible on church leaders (1Ti 3:4-5). This document offers such arguments as: “He [Kryuchkov] has nine children, the majority of whom are unbelievers.”²⁶ One can agree with all accusations against the CCECB from this document. On the other hand, the emphasis on the personality of G. K. Kryuchkov does not seem reasonable, having in mind that many of the AUCECB leaders could be accused of having unbelieving children, too.

While studying church history, one might feel an urge to edit it somehow. Sometimes it seems that detailed survey and analysis of certain stages of Christian history can only cause confusion and disappointment over both the church and Christianity as a whole. A similar desire appears while reading the Bible; sometimes we want to “edit” an event or the biography of a character. The Word of God is a strikingly realistic book. It always calls things by their proper names, not seeking to “retouch” or embellish the fate of an individual, nation, or church. There are many episodes in Christian history that could hardly be called bright and beautiful. But it is our task to study them honestly and objectively and be able to recognize our failures. It is in such periods that we see most clearly the will of God and His faithfulness to the words: “...I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Mt 16:18).

A Christian historian cannot and must not be a determinist. We cannot always arrange things in pigeonholes. For example, we are not able to put together a chain of cause-effect relations that would explain why eighteen people were killed because of the falling of the tower in Siloam (Lk 13:4). The nature of the church is divine/human, and even when humans make numerous mistakes and all circumstances both inside and out are against them, God still remains faithful and preserves the church.

²⁶ “Ob uklonenii STs...” 2004.

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