

Examination and Ratification of the Statute of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the U.S.S.R.*

Statement by N. A. LEVINDANTO

“Let us read from the book of Ecclesiastes. Chapter 8, verse 6: ‘To every purpose there is time and judgment.’ ‘Judgment’ involves the promulgation of a statute, an enactment—we must do something about it. In the life of our Church there must not be disorder, confusion, anarchy. No, all must be efficient, well-ordered, just, holy. Indeed, holiness and order are the adornment of the Church.

“As you know, since 1944, the Constitution of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (hereinafter AUCECB) has been changed twice, in 1948 and 1960.

“The 1960 Constitution of AUCECB, from the very outset, was not regarded as final and forever. Therefore it was deliberately kept before the mind of our churches; twice, as you know, AUCECB has circulated requests for comments and considered opinions, with the aim of reviewing and amending the Constitution of AUCECB at a convenient time.

“After that, the majority of our churches clearly indicated that they wanted to adopt the proposed changes in the Constitution of AUCECB.

“Bearing in mind all this, and the new opportunities which have opened up for us, AUCECB is now laying before the Assembly for their consideration and ratification a thoroughly revised Constitution for AUCECB, which we shall now call **THE STATUTE OF THE UNION OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AND BAPTISTS.**”

Brother N. A. Levindanto read the draft Statute paragraph by paragraph, point by point and clause by clause.

* Extract from the Report (*Bratsky Vestnik*, 1963, No. 6) of the All-Union Assembly of Evangelical Christians & Baptists in Moscow, October 15th-17th, 1963. It is taken from the report of the second day, Wednesday, October 16th.

Statute of the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the U.S.S.R.

I—GENERAL REMARKS

1.

The Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the U.S.S.R. is a voluntary union of churches of the Evangelical-Baptist confession. It embraces the previous unification of Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Christians of the Evangelical Faith, and Mennonites.

2.

Laid down as the basis of Evangelical Christian and Baptist doctrine are the Holy Scriptures—the (canonical) books of the Old and New Testaments.

II THE ALL-UNION COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AND BAPTISTS (AUCECB)

3.

The Union's supreme governing body is the assembly of representatives from the churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists.

The assembly of church representatives is convened as necessary, but at not more than 3 yearly intervals¹.

The assembly of church representatives :

(a) Meets to examine questions arising within the church life of Evangelical Christians and Baptists;

(b) Hears and ratifies the reports of AUCECB and of AUCECB's Committee of Oversight;

(c) Revises, modifies, and confirms the Statute of the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists;

(d) To put into action the decisions of the assembly of church representatives, and to carry on the business of the Union between assemblies of church representatives, the assembly of church representatives elects from among its participants, by a simple majority vote, a central directing agency—the AUCECB, consisting of 10 members, 5 candidates, and a Committee of Oversight² composed of 3 people.

4.

AUCECB elects from among itself a Praesidium, consisting of five people : president, two vice-presidents, a general secretary and a treasurer.

¹ i.e. at least every three years.

² In Russian "Inspecting Commission."

5.

AUCECB meets in full session as necessary, but at least once a year.

6.

Duties of the members of AUCECB are :

(a) To put into effect the decisions of the assembly of church representatives.

(b) To keep in touch with the churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists, both by correspondence and by visitation.

(c) To render the churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists spiritual and organizational help, both through the Senior Ministers and directly.

7.

To keep in touch with the churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists, and to render them spiritual and organizational help, the All-Union Council appoints Senior Ministers for each district, region and republic.

Senior Ministers are appointed from among experienced active members of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist brotherhood, with the agreement of the churches of which they are members.

8.

AUCECB periodically examines the work of Senior Ministers from both a general and a financial standpoint.

9.

AUCECB publishes the necessary spiritual literature for the churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists.

10.

AUCECB has ties with other unions of like faith, and also with other Christian churches and organizations in foreign countries; it conducts correspondence with them and, when need arises, despatches representatives to their congresses and conferences; it also invites foreign spiritual leaders to the U.S.S.R.

11.

AUCECB has a seal and a stamp.

12.

AUCECB has chancellery vis-à-vis the Praesidium.³

³ The meaning, though not very clear is, presumably, that the whole of AUCECB must "set its seal" on what the Praesidium does; i.e. AUCECB controls the Praesidium, not vice-versa.

13.

AUCECB keeps its material resources in a current account with the State Bank.

14.

Inspection of monetary resources, documents and financial reports is the concern of the Committee of Oversight of AUCECB. "Revcomissia"⁴ reports the result of its inspections to the assembly of church representatives, and at plenary sessions of AUCECB.

III—SENIOR MINISTERS OF THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AND BAPTISTS

15.

It is the duty of republic and regional Senior Ministers :

(a) To help the churches situated in their territories, both spiritually—taking part in services, giving spiritual instruction, and explaining to believers the proper attitude to Christian and civil duty—and also practically.

(b) To share, as opportunity offers, in the administration of the ordinances of the Church, in the choosing of the Church's ministers and in their ordination.

(c) To keep a list of the churches, and numbers of church members, in their territories.

(d) Senior Ministers for republics, in addition to this, direct the work of district Senior Ministers, and keep account of churches and church membership statistics on a republic-wide scale.

16.

(a) District Senior Ministers give account of their work to the republic Senior Ministers, and an account also of their finances.

(b) Senior Ministers for republics periodically render to AUCECB an account of their work and a financial statement.

IV—CHURCHES OF THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AND BAPTISTS, AND THEIR OFFICERS

17.

The churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists are a union of believers of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist confession, having attained their full majority, and having received water baptism on profession of faith.

⁴ The Committee of Oversight.

18.

Each person wishing to receive the water baptism of faith gives a written testimony to the minister of the church, and undergoes suitable examination.

19.

Churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists conduct their services, assembling in houses set apart by the State, or on rented premises.

20.

The churches' meetings for worship take place on Sunday, and also in the week on a day chosen by the individual church; and on Christian festival days: Christmas, New Year, the Baptism of Our Lord, Circumcision, Annunciation, Whitsun⁵, the Transfiguration, Harvest Festival, and Union Day.

21.

The breaking of bread in churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists is observed at the discretion of the church, usually on the first Sunday of each month.

22.

(a) The principal responsible person, responsible for the services of worship and for the spiritual education of church members, is the minister of the church.

(b) The minister is elected by the church.

(c) A church council of three persons is elected by the church.

(d) With regard to the money in each church's cash account, into which go the freewill offerings of the believers, a church "Revcomissia" of three persons is elected by the church. This oversight committee periodically examines the cash account and the material needs of the church, and makes suitable dispositions.

23.

The minister shall carry out each ordinance of the Church.

Note: In the event of illness or absence of the minister, members of the church council or preachers of the church can administer the ordinances, as the minister and church council may decide.

24.

Besides the minister, other church members may take part in the preaching at meetings for worship, as the minister and church council may decide.

25.

(a) Spiritual questions are decided by the minister, conjointly with the church council and the preachers of the church.

⁵ Also "Trinity" in Russian.

(b) All other matters are decided by the church council with the participation of the minister and members of the "Revcomissia."

(c) The supremely important matters—such as election of church officers, or their dismissal, election of members to the church council and Revcomissia, and other major questions—are presented by the church council for the decision of the church.

26.

(a) In churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists, in addition to preaching and prayer, an intrinsic part of worship is congregational and choral singing—with musical accompaniment.

(b) Singers in the choir, their leaders, and their accompanists also, are as a rule believing people of Evangelical-Baptist persuasion.

27.

(a) Each church has its own cash account, into which go the freewill offerings of the believers.

(b) The church's funds are spent: on the upkeep of the house of prayer, on the maintenance of church officers, and other church purposes such as quotas to AUCECB funds, and also to the funds of the regional and republic Senior Ministers.

(c) In each church there is kept a cash book showing income and expenditure; this is examined periodically by the church's committee of oversight, who make suitable dispositions.

(d) Each church has an inventory book, in which is entered the property of the church—both things received from the State by contract, and things bought and donated.

Brother N. A. Levindanto presented the Statute to the assembly. The assembly ratified it unanimously.

Translated by S. J. WALLACE.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

R. HAYDEN, B.A., B.D.

Minister, Waterfoot, Rossendale, Lancs.

F. BECKWITH, M.A.

Librarian, Leeds.

P. TOON, B.TH.

Student, King's College, London.

S. J. WALLACE, M.A.

Minister, Westbourne Park, London.

Reviews by: T. S. H. ELWYN, J. R. C. PERKIN, E. T. RYDER,
W. M. S. WEST.