

# Letters and Documents

## 1. *A Message from some Russian Baptist Pastors*

Much has been written by the Baptists in the USSR during the last decade. We have space for only a minute proportion of their total output in this issue.

The Baptists merged with other evangelical Christians in 1944 to form a united church—the Evangelical Christian and Baptist Church (ECB)—headed by an All-Union Council (AUCECB). In 1960 the authorities imposed new *Statutes* and a *Letter of Instructions* on the All-Union Council: the faithful were instructed to keep their children away from services, to stop those under 18 being baptized and to suppress so-called “unhealthy missionary tendencies”. Many Baptists—later called the *Initsiativniki*—reacted by rejecting the authority of the All-Union Council. They formed an Action Group in 1961, renamed the Organizing Committee, and demanded a congress at which disagreements could be discussed. A congress was held in 1963, but by 1965, when no agreement had been reached, the *Initsiativniki* formed their own governing body, the Council of Churches (CCECB). Some areas of the Soviet Union, however, were not affected by the schism: the believers continued to worship together, and in some cases Baptist pastors quietly buried the two disruptive documents and avoided friction.

Protocol No. 7<sup>1</sup>, mentioned below, was written by the *Initsiativniki* leaders in 1962. It accused the All-Union Council of “anti-church activity” and excommunicated some of its members and certain senior presbyters. The following extracts from *Bratsky Vestnik* (“Fraternal Herald”), the officially published Baptist journal, contain an appeal for unity from pastors, who at one time were members of the CCECB. Having rejoined the AUCECB, they reject the contents of Protocol No. 7.

### *Message to the Whole Brotherhood of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR*

from former pastors of the Council of Churches  
(*Bratsky Vestnik* No. 5, 1972, pp. 7-9)

To all brothers and sisters in Christ “. . . who through the justice of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ share our faith and enjoy equal privilege with ourselves. Grace and peace be yours in fullest measure, through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1 : 1-2).

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, this appeal to you who are outside the unity of the people of God comes from some who have supported the Council of Churches and have held spiritual ministry within that

<sup>1</sup> Michael Bourdeaux *Religious Ferment in Russia*, London, 1968, pp. 42-46.

movement, but thanks be to God, we have understood that division is not the way to purity and holiness in the things of God.

What has moved us to strive after unity in our Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood?

1. The removal by All-Union ECB congresses of the Letter of Instructions and the Decree of 1960.

2. The adoption by the 1963 and 1966 congresses of an ECB Statute which fully corresponds to the Word of God, and the restoration of Evangelical-Baptist denominational principles in the ministry of local AUCECB churches.

3. The blessed and lively witness of these churches and their brotherly attitude to brothers and sisters returning to the fold.

4. The constant striving by the AUCECB to find a way of reconciliation and unity.

Eleven years have gone by since the division in our brotherhood. Although it occurred in only a few local AUCECB churches, still it caused harm to the whole work of God. Estrangement and all sorts of fabrications created an atmosphere in which mutual love grew cold. The command of Christ, "Love one another as I have loved you," was not carried out in our relations. This enmity is especially apparent towards the AUCECB leaders. Letters accusing the senior brethren and circulated among local believers lead to suspicion and the estrangement of believers.

In the past years a new generation has grown up and the sad fact is that some brethren from the Council of Churches are educating them in unbrotherly attitudes towards the registered AUCECB churches. But such attitudes do not lead to unity. The way to unity lies only through reconciliation in Christ: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5 :9). "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12 :14). "With all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4 :2-3). It is with such words that the Word of God directs us into the way of peace and unity.

We are glad that God has granted us this way of bright joy in fellowship. We have personally convinced ourselves of the piety of the AUCECB leaders who were excommunicated by Protocol No. 7. Many of our own names are on this protocol.

Today, when reason and love have replaced our former zeal, which was not enlightened, we testify to all, that excommunication of the AUCECB does not correspond to the Word of God and that reliance on this protocol as a church document is simply illogical.

Apart from the invalidity of the above-mentioned document, the responsible leaders of the AUCECB have admitted their mistakes before congress members. These words of repentance have been published in *Bratsky Vestnik* and have become common property for believers throughout the world.

Only the brethren from the Council of Churches do not want to recognize this and educate their followers in a spirit of ill-will. In our talks with believers from the separated group we see the evil result of this unchristian education.

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Putting the resolutions of the congresses into effect, the AUCECB leaders over these years have done much to improve the spiritual life of the local churches. Overcoming opposition from CCECB brethren, they have made every effort to find points of contact with the separated groups, both by means of appeals and local visits. The results of this work are apparent: thousands of children of God have returned to form united churches.

For all those in doubt about the activity of the AUCECB, we declare that the work of God is being carried on in the power of the Holy Spirit; this is testified to by the good fruits of the Spirit in the life and ministry of the united brotherhood.

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Conscious of our responsibility before the Lord and the brotherhood for the work of unity, we offer the following suggestions:

1. That conversations on unity between the AUCECB and the CCECB be renewed with the aim that the forthcoming ECB congress should put an end to the sad phenomenon of division and should be the beginning of united service in the Lord's vineyard.

2. Pastors and members of local churches! We advise you not to postpone the work of unity to the future. The Lord calls us to be reconciled with one another today, paying homage to Him Who died for our sins, Who redeemed us with His Blood and gave us eternal life (1 Peter 3:11).

The Church of Christ is indivisible. It is the body of Christ. In one body there should be one spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

In the name of Christ's High-Priestly prayer (John 17) and remembering the labours and sufferings of the pioneers of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood, we ask all who sincerely strive for peace on the day of the breaking of bread to pray with fasting before the Lord for His help and blessing in reaching unity.

“Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?” (Mal. 2 : 10).

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (Rom. 16 : 24).

With brotherly greetings—former pastors of the CCECB :

1. Savchenko<sup>1</sup> Pyotr Ivanovich—Zhdanov.
2. Polyakov Vladimir Vasilievich—Smolensk.
3. Popov Alexandr Grigorevich—Nikitovka.
4. Osipov Alexei Grigorevich—Chuguyev.
5. Maivka Maxim Ivanovich—Lvov.
6. Lepesha Vladimir Stepanovich—Fastov (Kiev region).
7. Fomitsa Nikolai Yegorovich—Sumy region.
8. Remigailo Alexandr Karpovich—Kirovograd.
9. Kamyshov Nikolai Fyodorovich—Nikopol.
10. Kovalenko Leonid Yefimovich—Kiev.
11. Malik Nikolai Pavlovich—Berdyansk.
12. Senichenko Stepan Semyonovich—Donetsk-Petrovka.
13. Zakhartsev Anatoli Kirillovich—Kishinyov.
14. Yatsenko Grigori Alexeevich—Kokhtla-Yarva.

Kiev, 17 June 1972.

## 2. *An Appeal for Pastor Baturin*

Efforts to achieve unity among Baptists are jeopardized by the continuing persecution of those supporting the Council of Churches. Pastor Baturin was arrested in October 1972, and we print here an appeal from his wife and mother.

*To All Christians*

*To the Whole of World Public Opinion*

from Valentina Matveyevna BATURINA, Pelageya Vasilevna BATURINA  
and the six children

address: USSR, g. Shakhty, ul. Sadovaya 4, flat 13.

“Therefore turn thou to thy God” (Hosea 12 : 6)

“Ebedmelech said to the king: these men have done evil by casting  
Jeremiah into the cistern” (Jer. 38 : 8-10).

### APPEAL

I am the Christian mother of six children; we are constantly being persecuted for our faith in God. Today we are again sentenced to death by starvation because of the arrest of our husband and father, the only breadwinner of our family. On 7 October, 1972, my husband Nikolai Georgie-

<sup>1</sup> The surname is printed first.