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**MA in History**

**A summary of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation entitled: “Evangelical Christians-Baptists in BSSR in 1944 – 1985: conditions of existence and activity” prepared under the supervision of Aliaksandr Smalianchuk, Associate-Professor at the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.**

This work is devoted to the history of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (hereinafter referred to as - EChB) in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1944-1985. The modern EChB Church in Belarus occupies a significant place in the confessional structure. At the same time, the history of the EChB in the BSSR is located on the periphery of research in the modern Belarusian humanities, and it is almost not represented at all in Polish historiography.

The goals of this research are:

1. Analysis of the state policy in the USSR/ BSSR in relation to believers of the EChB Church in 1944–1985;
2. Characteristics of the activities of believers of the EChB Church in the BSSR in 1944–1985.

Wherein the author seeks to answer the following questions:

- a) What were the basic principles of the state policy regarding the EChB and the mechanisms for their implementation?
- b) How was the Union created in the BSSR? How was its structure and intercommunal relations formed?
- c) How was it possible for a believer to adhere to the principles of dogma in conditions of atheistic propaganda and anti-religious policies?
- d) What were the features of the development of Belarusian evangelical churches?

The following thesis is a hypothesis: in spite of the fact that believers of the EChB Church found themselves in unfavorable anti-religious conditions of existence in the BSSR during the period under review, they retained their structure, dogma and church practices through the mechanism of visible acceptance of restrictions or through opposition to state policy based on the principles of their teachings.

This work has the nature of historical research. First of all, it is based on the use of general scientific (analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, analogy and modeling), as well as special historical methods close to them (cognition of an object through the development category, comparative method, historical-system method). The methods and principles of historical research in the work are combined with developments in cultural anthropology, political science, sociology of religion and religious studies. A special place in the study is occupied by the oral history. The following interrelated questions were analyzed on the basis of the interviews of Evangelical Christians-Baptists collected by the author: the collective memory of the EChB, including religious, identity and traumatic experiences. In the context of microhistory, the fates of individual believers and their families are reflected.

Historiography on the research problem is quite wide. It is represented by the works of Soviet authors, Western researchers, the works of modern researchers from post-Soviet countries, including Belarus. The historiography includes works of not only historical nature, but also sociological, philosophical and religious studies.

The main sources of the research were documents from the archives of Belarus. Periodicals were also used, including self-printed and self-published documents, film documents, memoirs, and oral history.

The work consists of 6 sections. *The first section* introduces the topic of the study. It analyzes historiography and sources, describes the methods and methodology used in the study. It addresses the issue of terminology, which is quite relevant and important for understanding the representation and identity of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, as well as their perception by others. The dogma of Evangelical Christians-Baptists is also characterized and a brief history of evangelical churches on the territory of Belarus until 1944 is reflected.

*The second section* is devoted to the principles of state policy regarding the EChB in the BSSR and the mechanisms for their implementation. In fact, the policy of the authorities in the BSSR was anti-religious in nature. At the same time, in connection with the geopolitical

factor, with the change of Soviet leaders, as well as the existence of various confessions in the BSSR, either a pragmatic orientation or an ideological element prevailed in state policy in the field of relations with religions.

The third, fourth and fifth sections are formed according to the problem-chronological principle. *The third section* tells about the emergence of the Union of EChB, which united several directions of evangelical churches. The institutionalization of the Union of EChB was under the complete control of the state, which sought to regulate the activities of the leadership of this religious association.

A thorny issue throughout the Soviet period was the accession to the Union of EChB under pressure from the Pentecostal authorities. They had some differences in church practices from Baptists and evangelical Christians. As a result, the state provoked the emergence of internal conflicts in the Union of EChB, as well as the illegal existence of Pentecostal communities that refused to join the Union of EChB.

*The fourth section* discusses the causes and consequences of the separation in the Union of EChB, which took place in the 1960s, describes the Initiative Group for convening a congress of believers, which later grew into a separate illegal organization - the Council of Churches of EChB. In this section, the author raises the question: how to preserve the EChB communities in the face of oppression and limitation of church practices. To answer this question, various tactics of believers in relations with the Soviet and party authorities are analyzed. Conventionally, they were divided into two groups: tactics of adaptation and peaceful tactics of resistance. If the leadership of the Union of EChB chose the tactics of adaptation and “wise maneuvering” in order to preserve the structure of the EChB association, representatives of the Council of Churches of EChB tried to adhere to the tactics of equal relations with the authorities.

The simultaneous existence of these two tactics – the opportunistic and principled assertion of their rights – soon influenced the government policy towards Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

*The fifth section* is devoted to the activities of the EChB in the 1960–80s. – a period of gradual changes in the life of evangelical communities. The active work of supporters of the Council of Churches of the EChB facilitated the implementation of reforms in the structure and organization of the Union of EChB.

This section also discusses the struggle of Evangelical Christians-Baptist for the implementation of the principle of freedom of conscience. This question is analyzed in the context of the dissident movement. In the BSSR, representatives of evangelical churches were the most active dissidents compared to nonconformists from among the intelligentsia and students. The activity of dissident believers was systematic, organized and solidarity. The peculiarity of the activity of believers was that they sought to solve the issues of relations between the state and religious organizations, and not to change the existing state structure in the Soviet Union.

Special consideration was given to the issue of the spiritual education of children in the EChB communities. Believers tried to resist an atheistic state in shaping a worldview.

*The sixth section* reflects the daily life of believers in the BSSR. For Evangelical Christians-Baptist in the identity system in the first place was the relationship of self with the church, with the community of regenerated people. In everyday practice, the EChB tried to adhere to the infallible authority - the Bible and the commandments of Jesus Christ.

Regulators of pious behavior were not only the conscience of the believer, but also the religious community, which monitored the fulfillment of Bible regulations and the principles of dogma.

The prohibition of public evangelism and missionary principles (as well as the repressive policy of the state) led to the fact that the EChB communities were slowly replenished with neophytes, especially representatives of the youth and intelligentsia. The basis of the community were women of old age with a low level of education.

Through the principle of righteous behavior in everyday life, the EChB fought the stereotypes that existed in relation to them in public discourse. The Soviet state had more opportunities and mechanisms for the formation of a negative image of the believer. Therefore, even in modern Belarusian society there is the problem of restoring the positive image of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. In the process of forming a positive representation of the EChB, among other things used was including the memory of the Soviet past, as the time when believers showed steadfastness in faith and patience. At this stage, this memory is communicative memory (Jan Assmann), it does not go beyond the walls of the EChB prayer houses.