

# **The First Russian Speaking Evangelical Council**

**Pre-Council and Post-Council Papers**

УДК 277.4(082)  
ББК 86.376  
М34

Religious and Philosophical Papers. Issue 1. The First Russian Speaking Evangelical Council. — Moscow. 2010.  
ISBN 978-5-905150-01-2

This collection is the first in the series of religious and philosophical papers. The principal intention of this collection is to offer the reader an independent exposition of the theological and philosophical thought developed by Moscow Theological Seminar, Evangelical Council, and history based religious role plays. This series will strive for collaboration of the religious and philosophical tradition with the newest methods of sociological studies. This collection of papers will formulate a social philosophy that is non-dogmatic yet orderly and unifying in nature. This work is dedicated to a living and independent thought that is creative, complex, and broad in scope. This thought is profound enough that it is able to change the inner and then the outer spheres of self-awareness. The series is intended to influence the social coalitions to which it belongs in one way or another, to create new more intimate circles of discussion, and to promote action and development.

The first collection in the series is comprised of the works of the First Evangelical Council that took place in Naro-Fominsk district of Moscow region in May of 2010. This collection consists of pre-Council papers that were prepared by the Organizing Committee. These papers are a discussion of the most urgent topics and problems of today's Evangelical movement. Also, the collection includes the post-Council papers in which the results of the Council work are recorded.

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## **Introduction to the First Russian Speaking Evangelical Council<sup>1</sup>**

The Evangelical Council is a rebirth of a New Testament tradition. This Council is gathered in order to expound and solve urgent problems of church life through an engaged dialogue and joint efforts of seeking God's will ( Acts15:6-29 ).

By joining spiritual and theoretical components we will be able to understand what God wants and what we can and must do.

Any Christian, who understands his or her responsibility for the fate of the Christian Church and is active in his or her ministry can take part in the Council regardless of their ecclesiastical office or denominational affiliation. This is how the principle of the universal priesthood is fulfilled through the Council (1Peter 2:9).

The Evangelical Council takes place annually, a week before the feast of the Pentecost – the birth day of the Church of Jesus Christ. In so doing the Council points to the unity of the Body of Christ.

The Interim Office is a group that is active in the period between the Councils.

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Council refers to an annual gathering of Russian speaking Christians. The first and the second Councils met near Moscow, Russia in 2010 and 2011. The third Russian speaking Council should take place in Kiev, the Ukraine a week prior to Pentecost in 2012.



## **Urgent Problems of the Evangelical Movement<sup>2</sup>**

### **Pre-Council Articles**

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<sup>2</sup> Here and in many instances below, we do not refer to the global problems of the Evangelical movement but only to those of the Russian speaking world.

Dear Participants of the Evangelical Council!  
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Several events in preparation for the Evangelical Council took place last year in local churches and associations. Representatives from various religious confessions and jurisdictions participated in these events. A seminar was organized. One of the purposes of the seminar was to study theological, philosophical, humanitarian and structural aspects of our evangelical ministry.

These actions allowed us to formulate the urgent problems that are posed before the contemporary Evangelical movement.

These tasks before us are:

- 1. To deepen the knowledge and understanding of the identity of the members of the Evangelical churches.**
- 2. To create a proper intellectual, social and political discourse.**
- 3. To bring a cardinal change in the situation of the churches in the society – on one hand to overcome the existing marginalization and on the other, to preserve the inakovost of the believers.**
- 4. To prioritize the aspects of the ministry – strategic concentration.**
- 5. To use the advantages of net structure – regional dispersion.**
- 6. To organize yearly Evangelical Councils.**

Let us now look at every task in detail.

## 1. Deepening of Our Religious Identity

For many lay people the history of their congregation begins with the foundation of the local church or of the denomination to which their congregation belongs. Usually this means the tumultuous 90s of the 20th century (the time when Evangelical churches appeared in Russia) or in rare occasions from the Reformation, but never from the time of the Apostolic church.

Indeed, there are some references to the Apostolic times, and the Apostolic spirit. However, the identification with the Church that has been in existence from the first century of the Christian era cannot be traced, kept or demonstrated. Almost always there is a deep gap in a believer's perception of the history of the New Testament church and the contemporary church. This gap puts the believers outside the history and, thus, they find themselves outside **the tradition**. Such an absence of the historical roots leads to the disruption in the religious identity which positions Evangelical churches in Russian society as alien, foreign, and persecuted.

There is another reason for the "shrinking" of the religious identity of our believers. A tendency has been observed of a gradual alienation of Russian Evangelical churches from Russian speaking churches in other countries that had been a part of the Soviet Union in the past. Some of it is our own doing caused by ignorance and fear. Some of it is done by many deliberate attempts of those who are afraid of the unity of the Russian speaking Evangelical movement. Very often the political frictions between countries can account for this. Examples of this would be the relationships with Ukraine, Georgia, and Baltic countries.

Strained relations exist even with the believers who moved to the West and planted churches there. More often than not, they are seen as donors who are obliged to sponsor our local initiatives.

There is a strong emphasis in many denominations to identify only their own beliefs with the Evangelical movement.

As a cure for this problem we started working on reconstruction of history and theology. The goal of this reconstruction is to show that the Evangelical movement is rooted in the Apostolic era, and the spirit of Evangelical freedom can be seen through **the entire history of the Church** in various forms, times, confessions, and denominations. In so doing, we will be able to create a firm foundation for our ministry in Russia. We can show our historical tradition of continuity with the Universal Church and demonstrate our dedication to the unceasing manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Most importantly we will create a mechanism that will allow us to protect the Evangelical movement from familiar and, therefore, easily copied **Byzantine model**<sup>3</sup>. We will have to show the roots of the Evangelical movement in Russian history despite the predominant authoritarian character of this history. Also, we will have to demonstrate the unity of the Russian speaking Evangelical Christians who have a similar cultural background.

As a result, we have **three main points** on which we need to focus our attention while formulating the specifics of the Evangelical movement in Russia.

1. We should show **succession** from the Apostolic era and the New Testament church to the Evangelical church of today. We are the heirs of the Church fathers, apologists, distinguished saints and reformers, missionaries, preachers of the Gospel, Russian Christian philosophers and contemporary Western theologians. Uncovering this inheritance is our greatest pursuit.

2. We should **overcome confessional boundaries** to find unity of all the Evangelical movement. There is a need to put Evangelical, even more so Christian identity, above confessional or jurisdictional affiliations. We need to endeavor to not destroy the existing

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<sup>3</sup> Byzantine model refers to the tight connection between the state and the church with the dominant authority of an Emperor. This model existed in the Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire).

confessions and jurisdictions, but to transcend denominational boundaries and limitations. It is vitally important to rediscover the Unified Church with its many religious rites, multifaceted fullness of methods and traditions of worshipping God. In order to do this we will have to lay such a deep theological foundation that will not allow even to think about the Church without having in mind its unity and diversity.

3. We should examine **the continuous connection** of the Russian Evangelical movement with the Russian speaking congregations abroad and the Evangelical movement as a whole. There is a need to **re-evaluate** the existing relationships with Christians in other countries, and restore the ones that were severed with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As a result of the above, before us there is the demand of a gradual move in our focus from identity of our churches to this realization:

- We are more Evangelical than Protestant believers<sup>4</sup>.
- Our churches are more Evangelical than Protestant in essence. As such, our churches are affiliated not only by associations and unions, but kept as one by the moving of the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus Christ.

In unity there is power. In diversity there is freedom. That is why **we are one in diversity**. Let these words become not only an inspiring manifesto, but a modus operandi for our endeavors.

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<sup>4</sup> Culturally in Russia the term “Protestant” is used to describe all Christians who are neither Orthodox nor Roman Catholic. Frequently, believers call themselves “Protestants”.

## 2. The Creation of Our Own Discourse

Most of us are imitators. We copy various actions, approaches, documents, even agendas of everyone who is older and more influential than us – the Russian Orthodox church, Russia as a state, and the West.

**Even when we would like “to play the game” according to our own rules we are skillfully forced to do it on somebody else’s territory according to somebody else’s rules. Thus, our weaknesses become apparent but our strengths are not given a chance to be manifested.**

Frequently our initiatives and ideas are taken by others and at times become distorted. In the meantime, our own resources are used for matters that are furthest or even the opposite of the goals of the Evangelical movement. Various forces are striving to use the Evangelical movement to implement their own plans which have nothing to do with the spreading of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.

We can and must create intellectual, institutional, media and social platforms where the leaders and speakers of the Evangelical movement will be able to set their agendas. The rules of the dialogue in such fields should be determined by us on the bases of our values, our ethics, our knowledge, and on our discernment of **what is right**.

This discourse must have a solid foundation. It should be based on the following principles:

- We should have a more critical evaluation of the world, including our Russian and local realities.
- We must have a developed theology – a theology that is not heavily systematic and unconcerned with life, but the kind that touches upon the burning issues of the day.
- There ought to be a constantly renewable program of the unified action that is born by the collective efforts.

All of the above requires a higher level of church management, as well as theological and philosophical thought.

Undoubtedly, the success of such a discourse, which should be characterized by both prayer and hard work (*urbi et orbi*), depends greatly on the personal character of the speaker and, in particularly, upon their courage, honesty, and ability to express themselves with a great degree of clarity.

### 3. Changes in the Status of the Evangelical Churches in the Society – Inakovost<sup>5</sup> Instead of the Marginalism

Marginalism<sup>6</sup> is a place in the society where one does not have any influence on the culture around them. To be marginal means to be by the roadside.

**As a rule, marginal groups remain weak and impaired. In the end, they are pitiful and, most importantly, are destined to stay outside the historical process.**

**Inakovost allows us to work with the world yet to continue to be faithful to ourselves, our way, and the Word.**

Inakovost presupposes that the world is **aware of you** even if it hates you. The world not only acknowledges your right for existence but also has to take you into consideration and then adjust to your opinions.

Inakovost allows us to transmit our position into the world and by so doing, change it. It is vitally important for us to overcome our historically inherited marginalism so that we can demonstrate that there is **another** way of life, **another** method of worship, **another** Church model, and, as a result, **another** Russia. In this, actually, our tradition is found: the core of a Russian theological pursuit is in the search for the unknown Kitez city<sup>7</sup> and in the anticipation of the Holy Russia.

The calling of the Evangelical Church in Russia is precisely in the overcoming of this marginalism. Without this it is impossible to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and to be His light in this world. We have had to face some leaders of the Evangelical churches who would present their own marginalism or that of their congregation as inakovost. It is necessary to discern such substitutions and speak against them openly.

At the same time, in the attempts to overcome marginalism there is a danger of losing such inakovost that distinguishes the followers of Jesus Christ as **being in the world but not of the world**. However, even this danger (of losing inakovost), of which we are well aware, will not be able to make us abandon the task of transcending the marginalism, even if it means to live out our inakovost in the intensified form. It is a crucial assignment. We need to look diligently for the ways to solve it.

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<sup>5</sup> **Inakovost** translated literally means “distinctiveness”, “uniqueness” in lifestyle, behavior and values. Something or someone that is set apart, different from the main stream society can be described by this word. Scripturally speaking this word means “being in the world but not of this world”. Since there is no precise equivalent in the English language the translator with the permission of the authors decided to leave the word as is.

<sup>6</sup> “Marginalism” historically has various definitions. Here, we adhere to the definition which denotes the exception from a historical process and the inability to predetermine it. The author chooses to coin this word by ‘poetic license’.

<sup>7</sup> In Russian legends Kitez is a lost messianic city which was located near the city of Nizhny Novgorod on the beautiful shores of the Svetloyar lake. According to the legends, when Mongol armies came to capture the city, the citizens would not fight them but remained in prayer. The entire city with all the homes, cathedrals, and the people was rescued and hid from the enemies’ eyes by the lake’s waters. The legends say that only people with pure hearts and souls are able to find the way to this city.

## 4. Finding and Determining Priorities in Our Ministry

Our movement is facing an important assignment. We need to move forward and get established on new levels in the existing social systems. The solution lies in the direct connection between the ministry of our congregations on local levels and with our standing in the society as a whole. We need to choose these priorities and concentrate our major efforts in a given direction. It is unavoidable that other parts of the 'front' will suffer, but the results of the offensive will justify the losses.

**To determine one key aspect of serving others is to make a decision of a life significance.**

To lead the offensive always holds great risks. However, in our situation every effort 'to hold the fort' at all costs presents not only a greater risk, but an enormous mistake. This mistake that will lead to a gradual but guaranteed exclusion from all spheres of life. At times, we do not have enough resources to support work on levels which we already achieved. That is why we need to choose one key direction for our ministry in the society. It is a choice of vital importance. While determining the direction for our ministry, we need not understand this service exclusively as an activity of helping the poor.

If we concentrate our resources in one direction we will increase our chances for a successful outcome. In the process of determining that direction we should consider the strengths of our Evangelical movement. Also, we should concentrate on the correlation in the development and the activity of the local churches on one hand, and our position in the society as a whole. Preferably, we should choose such a course of action in our ministry which is not obvious or to which other "players" on the religious field are not prepared.

We need this Council to set the goals for determining the offensive, for deciding on the tactics and strategies that are supported by the entire movement, and, in collaboration with one another we can commit to moving in this direction. More importantly, we need this Council to be sensitive to the prophetic guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## 5. Regional Decentralization

After carrying out several strategic initiatives in various regions of the country it became obvious that geographically remote local congregations have an unused and untapped potential. These congregations are making an immeasurable impact on the society. Local churches want and are capable of more than they are actually doing today.

**The traditional Russian centralization completely corresponds with the Byzantine model and utterly contradicts the Evangelical model.**

By following the well-trodden path of Moscow centralization and, thus, authoritarianism, we undermine the principle foundation of the Evangelical movement – its network structure.

We need to learn to use the immanent advantages of this structure, and **by dispersing** we should rely on the above mentioned, rich potential of the local congregations.

We should not forget that in the network structure of the Evangelical movement lies its strength, in that it protects it against ill-willed attacks of its adversaries. Also, the network structure safeguards the movement against the administrative mistakes of its leaders.

We are able now to formulate practical goals in this aspect. We need to develop net inclusive projects. Any congregation of a given region will be able to take part in them after it establishes its functional positions. If necessary, these churches should be given support in resources and personnel. We should purposefully delegate the authority and responsibility to them. In so doing we will be “sowing” the Christian seeds of growth in the immense expanse of our country.

## 6. Yearly Planning and Carrying out of the Evangelical Council

Our Evangelical movement requires a definite time when we can work in collaboration on the above mentioned objectives. In fact, this is the most important charge of the Council. This event should become an all-embracing Evangelical undertaking. Despite the fact that the 2010 Council was organized by the core group comprised of the representatives of one Evangelical union, the Council should not be an agency of one denomination or confession. It is imperative for the Council to become a place of meeting, prayer and a prophetic inquest of all representatives of the entire Evangelical movement. As the participants of the first Council we should ascertain that and create strict guidelines for future Councils.

The Council meeting should become a tradition. It should be an event on our yearly calendar. We recommend that the Council convenes annually on the week preceding the day of Pentecost – the Day of the birth of the Church of Jesus Christ. This way today's Council will be directly connected to the New Testament time when the Apostles assembled in prayer, fellowship and dialogue concerning the Early Church (Acts 1:12-26).

**The Evangelical Council is a “point of connection” of our Evangelical movement.**

We must not allow for the Council to morph into an exclusive conference for ministers of our churches. Politicians, economists, journalists, scientists, philosophers, and theologians should take an active part in this Council. Otherwise, the principle of the universal priesthood will be but empty words.

The Council should go beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. From the very beginning we must encourage the participation of the prominent representatives of the entire Evangelical movement from all over the world. As a result we will be able to formulate and define our own view of what *is* the **Russian world**. Various unions and denominations may and should use the provisions and programs of the Council for the development of their own strategies. However, this work should transpire outside the Council.

The Council void of authoritarian spirit will have a spiritual authority. We believe that the yearly Evangelical Council should take place a week leading to the Pentecost. The Council should have an extended agenda, open discussion, mutual prophetic pursuit, joint deliberation, extensive pre-Council preparation, examination of and participation in major national and international programs. Then the Council will be able to become a genuine expression of the Evangelical movement and God's awaited intention for Russia.



## **Goals for Further Development of the Evangelical Movement**

### **Post-Council Articles**

Dear Participants of the Evangelical Council!  
Dear Brothers and Sisters In Christ!

The first Evangelical Council took place on May 16 through 21, 2010. It was an important step toward creating a solid foundation of the Evangelical movement in Russia. Everything that transpired – worship services, the Lord's Supper, the open and honest discussion of the most difficult topics of the development and ministry of the Evangelical church, prayer services and fellowship – leads us to believe that the Evangelical movement is the reality of the Church today and to see its future.

The Council postulates a firm foundation for the true understanding of the Evangelical movement and set definitive directions of its development. The following topics were discussed during the work of the Council:

1. **Evangelical spirit** – a life-creating force in Russian history
2. **Christian agenda** – a condition of the birth of the different Russia
3. **The Evangelical movement** – a type of Christian coexistence
4. **An effective and active approach** – the basic condition of the existence of the Evangelical movement
5. **Council** – a form of expressing the principle, “unity in diversity”

# 1. Evangelical Spirit

## A Life Creating Force In Russian History

We commonly understand history as a sequential and objective account of the past. Such an understanding presupposes that a historical fact is foreordained, and a person from the very beginning comprehends its meaning. In reality, facts are always selected, sorted out, and interpreted. This interpretation is always intentional<sup>1</sup> and sometimes even biased. It is invariably significant for the individual. Only through an **analysis and explanation** can the facts become historical, and the history itself can become meaningful. Only after acquiring this meaning can we discern the present, and organize the desired future.

The history of Russia is constantly being interpreted to represent the Byzantine model of a state as the only proper, logical and possible model. The idea of Moscow as the next **Rome** is seen as natural, historically predetermined and redeeming for our country, and then through the concept of **katehona**<sup>2</sup> even for the whole world. We forget that as a result the natural outcome determined by such views of history becomes a clerical and authoritarian government and state which oppress Christ's Church.

It is useless to dream of a society that is based on laws, free and open, without the proper re-evaluation of the Russian history. That is why we are returning to the facts that prove that there were other models of establishing and developing our country. The grandeur of Russia could have been built without sacrificing her sons and daughters. The true greatness and might are reached, not through the oppression of the individual and the eradication of humanism from the social and political life of a society, but through discovering and releasing the great potential of the free and responsible members of that society.

In Russian history there has always been a viable spiritual source that gave Russian people genuine strength. We call this source the **Evangelical spirit** because it always has been connected to a free, non-clerical proclamation of the Gospel and with a living, unreserved yearning for the Word of God.

The moving of the Evangelical spirit in Russia could be traced to the times long before Prince Vladimir. It breathes, for example, in the fervor of Princess Olga and the merchants who were building cathedrals and founded various Christian assemblies in Novgorod, Kiev and other cities of the Gardarika<sup>3</sup> long before the official conversion of Russia to Christianity. After the formal conversion of Russia, Christianity ceased being a free choice of an individual and turned into a political undertaking of Prince Vladimir and Kiev's throne<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In this instance *intentional* refers to a process directed to a determined result

<sup>2</sup> In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians in which he talks about an impossibility of the coming of the end of times until the "one who holds it" = *katehona* is not taken away: "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back (ο κatexων) will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed..." (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8). Despite of the many interpretations of this passage in Byzantine dominated an understanding that the *one who holds back* is the power and authority of an emperor, a Caesar, with whose strength the world is being held back from the coming of the Antichrist. Thus, a destruction of the empire and revolt against Caesar will lead to the universal catastrophe. This understanding of the *katehona* is the foundation for the concept of Moscow as the Third Rome.

<sup>3</sup> This ancient Scandinavian name for Russia literally means "the country of many cities". Such was the image of Russia to her conquerors – the Rurik dynasty. The deeper meaning of this name shows that the conditions were created for the assimilation of Christianity in Russia because early Russian Christians originally were city dwellers. Then they continued to evangelize from city to country. In Grand Duchy of Moscow or Moscovy the city life was greatly weakened and compromised by Mongol invasion. Then a great part in converting the population to Christianity played monasteries. They spread enlightenment and progressive thinking throughout the countryside.

<sup>4</sup> Kiev not Moscow was the capital of Russia then. Thus, the name *Kievan Rus*. Now Kiev is the capital of the Ukraine. Prince Vladimir converted Russia to Christianity at the end of the 10th century A. D. (*Translator's note*)

**Prince Vladimir converted Russia to the Christian religion but Christianity, to a great degree, stopped being a free choice of an individual.**

This Evangelical spirit is undoubtedly present in the life and acts of the scientist and Great Prince, Yaroslav the Wise, as well as the venerable Sergius of Radonez and numerous reformers that lived in Moscow and Novgorod. It can be seen in the actions of St. Petersburg's intelligentsia who searched for the living Word of the Gospel in the formalin orthodox state when Pobedonostsev<sup>5</sup> controlled the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 19th century. It is present in the lives of many more other authentic Christians. They were the people who belonged to different spheres of the society, confessions and eras, yet were united by the Spirit of Christ. This very Evangelical spirit helped our nation to rise from the ruins of wars, occupations, and famines, to keep creative powers under the pressure of despotism, and to overcome the rigidity of the established formal religion.

The paradox of Russian history is that these great achievements and victories are attributed, not just to the Evangelical spirit, but to the very forces that suppressed the freedom of thought that purged any manifestations of true citizenship, and supported despotism of the Eastern origin. The spirit of this force, that is pompously called "**Byzantism**", has no life creating power, and thus, has been preying on the Evangelical spirit. In the effort to keep a **right to be preeminent**, Byzantism has been trying to, if not annihilate, then at least push the Evangelical spirit to the curb of the history and of everyday life.

It was the same with the Christian conversion of Russia to Christianity. Prince Vladimir used the Joyous News<sup>6</sup> of the Kingdom of God to strengthen his political power<sup>7</sup>.

The same happened at the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries. Russia became free from the Mongol oppression and was given a chance to become an independent state.

The rise of spiritual ardor in various layers of the Russian society was used to affirm the concept of "Moscow as a Third Rome. This idea is alien to the Christian self-consciousness. For the First Rome is the Rome of the Caesar who ordered the destruction of the Temple. It is the place of the public execution of Peter, Paul and thousands more faithful followers of Christ. The Second Rome is a place where the Church became "domesticated" and subjugated to the interests of the empire. Exactly the same occurred in the history of the Russian church when a Christian state assimilated **Philotheus'** formula of Moscow as the Third Rome.<sup>8</sup>

Without a doubt, the choice of this concept determined the further development of Russian history. The fruit of this model is well-known. It is a clerical and despotical governed state that produces a serf-like way of thinking and self-understanding; a state in which formal religiosity and church rites are domineering and encouraged. As a result all that is creative, original, free, longing, and unconventional is suppressed and purged<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Konstantine Pobedonostsev (May 21, 1827 – March 23, 1907) was a Russian jurist, statesman and advisor to the two last Russian tsars -- Alexander III and Nikolai II. He was one of the most influential men who held the post of Ober-Procurator -- the highest layman office of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox church. Initially this office was established by Peter the Great, the first Emperor of the Russian Empire, in an effort to bring the Russian Orthodox Church closer under his immediate control.

<sup>6</sup> Even though the most common expression is Good News, here we use the contemporary version of the key Evangelical term. It was introduced into the Russian linguistic culture in the newest translation of the New Testament by Russian Biblical Society.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, this joy became a necessary or obligatory joy, and all the other joys or even the absence of such became a crime against the state.

<sup>8</sup> Philotheus or Filofei (1465–1542) was a hegumen of the Yelizarov Monastery in Pskov in the 16th century. He is credited with authorship of the Legend of the White Cowl and the Third Rome prophecy. Wikipedia.com (Translator note)

<sup>9</sup> "Yet you erected prisons and imposed bans: Courts extinguishes passion, Governments suppress revolts, Doctors smother lives, Priests obliterate consciousness, ... , being sterile is not a virtue." *M. Voloshin*

In one word, everything is persecuted that disrupts the “holy” order that is established by the anointed tsar. In fact, all three Russian revolutions occurred due to the rupture of this chronic “ulcer”.

Despite all the repressions, the evangelical spirit continued to influence the history of the Russian people. It is not in the official religion, but in this spirit we find the beginnings of Russian holiness, the Russian God-seeking movement, Russian religious philosophical thought, and the Russian Evangelical movement.

**The other Russia is attainable because it exists in us!**

The manifestations of the Evangelical spirit were especially evident during the tumultuous times of change, when there was an opportunity to come out of the old “Byzantine” route and make a step towards a new and different Russia, one that is free from despotism and clerical domination of the Byzantine

heritage.

Today we yearn to see the **other** Russia that is free, creative; open to the world of ideas and people. A Russia that is facing every individual person. The other Russia is possible and attainable because it exists in us and in the hearts of millions of our fellow citizens that are living outside of the Byzantine model. However, for this possibility to become the reality **we must formulate and include a Christian agenda into the intellectual discourse of the day.**

## 2. A Christian Agenda

### A Condition of the Rebirth of Radically Different Russia

A Christian agenda for Russia is an evangelical outlook on the fate of our country in the contemporary world and its future in Christ.

A Christian agenda presupposes that the Evangelical coalition must discern its calling to be **the prophetic voice of its people**. As prophetic people we are able and should have our own viewpoint that is based on the different interpretation of our history, thorough understanding of the essence of Russian people and foresight of God's calling to Russia. In other words, a Christian agenda is ***an awareness and a proclamation of God's intent for Russia***.

There are many ways for Russia to make strides forward. The majority of them are based on the past and the present. It is precisely in the past and in the present we see the ideal for which our country should strive.

**A Christian outlook is rooted in history and is fed by it. However, the ultimate goal of it is in the eternity.**

A Christian outlook is rooted in history and is fed by it. However, its ultimate goal is in eternity. Thus, it presupposes **a constant unreserved restoration of God's purpose for Russia**. In approaching the goals this way we will not be copying others. Copies are always worse than the original. Thus, if we copy the paradigms of others we will definitely fail.

The Byzantine paradigm is an example from the ancient past and not a successful one. An attempt to have a Medieval empire as a model for the post-industrial era is going to fail. The same is true of the opposite approach. Mimicking Western models causes our country to lag behind. We would be eternally trying to catch up. This would affirm the status of Russia as a third world country that does not and cannot influence the world.

The Christian agenda we have in mind presumes the creation of the original, not a copy. Such an agenda will be relevant and urgent for Russia as well as for the whole world community, but mainly for the Church of Christ which is one, as Christ is One. We can and should fight for this **other** kind of Russia. We should fight to be able to escape the beaten path. We should battle for the Russia which belongs to Christ.

Here we are not talking about a battle with foreign and domestic enemies. We have in mind our own lethargy, apathy, cowardice, and inertia. These are our real adversaries. We should be careful though not to sacrifice our Evangelical values to the momentary conjecture. To proclaim the Christian agenda also means to announce one's readiness **to fight for a different Russia** and thus, to sacrifice a lot.

At the same time the Christian agenda means **gratitude to God for Russia**. It means being grateful for things He has already done in our people, in our land, and for the things He will do. Especially we should be grateful for the great privilege of being His fellow workers through whom His plan is being fulfilled in Russia. Our gratitude is an expression of our faith in Him and His will for our land. He is coming!

The Christian agenda could be perceived from different perspectives.

First, it could be seen as Christianizing of the existing secular agenda. In this case, we are simply choosing from it all the points which correspond with Christian values and enriching them with theological insights and Scriptural references. The movement towards the secular world is not without advantages. Many postulates of the high society cannot be realized without a deep appropriation of the Christian values. This means that the secular political society is influenced by Christianity, at least by a small degree. Also, it has become evident that the Russian

government cannot achieve its strategic goals without the support of Christians and some parts of the society that have been influenced by Christianity.

However, this approach has a major drawback. It does not presuppose any prophetic vision. It does not demand any fortitude of faith nor is able to foresee the future. With such an approach there is a risk that Christians would be used only as a working force to undertake the task that no one else wishes to do, and the mainstream society will go forth without them or their influence. Then it follows that this is not an acceptable model for forming the Christian agenda, but merely a form of support of the secular world with partial inclusion of Christianity in it. This particular model for the Christian future of Russia cannot be used.

Second, we can offer our own **ideal** plan. However, it is nearly impossible for the secular world to comprehend it. Even for us it will be difficult to execute. This model can completely correlate with the spirit of the apocalyptic literature but cannot be accepted by the world. Thus, it will remain a parallel reality. In this case, Christians unavoidably are marginalized and criticized for their understanding of the reality (this understanding might be completely correct, especially if it is expressed in metaphysical terms). However, no one is interested in it.

We should not let go of the perspective of history which is not limited by time because, by this definition, it is being disclosed in the duration of time. It is a duty of Christians to measure the fate of the world on the scale of eternity. The authentic Christian agenda assumes that timeless truths that inspire us are rooted in an actual time frame, connected with lives of the individuals, with their needs and problems. These truths demand real life solutions, given not only to the members of the Church, but also to the people that have a different world view.

There is a third possibility. It would be the easiest to achieve and is the most demanded by the people who have had their fill of political correctness. We are talking about a common dialogue on the topic of “the world peace”. This model of Christian world view is easily

**The Russian government cannot achieve its strategic goals without the support of Christians and some parts of the society that have been influenced by Christianity.**

recognizable. This model dominates at every conference and discussion where respectable and recognizable representatives of “traditional” religions converge. The main problem with this model or agenda is that it is no longer exclusively Christian. It has become a compromise which is worse than any alternative. Also, it is no longer an agenda because it does not offer any real steps and solutions for the future; solutions that will make that future better than the present.

At last, there is a fourth model. We call it **a Christian agenda as justification of the future**. Who but the people of faith are capable to determine the moral standards of an individual in the future, to see things that are not, to justify the future? Here we are not talking about justification as a reconciliation of the secular morals of the contemporary individual to the alluring images of the coming technological and informational sphere. We are not talking here about squeezing our world view in any future and adapting it to the national and confessional boundaries.

We are talking about a necessity of **forming the future** and its concealed image. We are going to name and confirm the **future values**. We are going to see the impending day for what it is. We will not reject it nor will we be afraid of it. We will accept it. And we will give the future a sound foundation in the present. We will do it God’s way, by breathing life into lifeless form. **We** will be **responsible for the future**.

The Church has done that before. Augustine and Pope Leo toiled to prepare for the coming Dark Ages. As a result, the Roman Church was the only force that kept Europe as a whole and reminded everyone of the former great achievements. Later Luther, Calvin and other Reformers gave theological foundation to the upcoming era. Due to them Protestantism became the future of the Christianity in the industrial world.

The world is afflicted again. It finds itself on the verge of many radical changes. It is absolutely essential to lay a firm spiritual foundation for the new era. The official Church prefers to mourn over the passing world instead of inspiring the coming one. *The Christian agenda as justification of the future* can belong only to certain people who have specific knowledge and will. At this time a following question is raised: **Which form is able to contain such knowledge and will?**

### 3. Evangelical Movement A Type of Christian Coexistence

“The wind blows (the Spirit breathes – in the Russian translation of the Bible) where it wishes” John 3:8. God does not need limits established by people. His Church is able to overcome all human boundaries – political, racial, denominational, and confessional.

Our predecessors who formulated the slogan **“In the essential – unity, in the secondary – diversity, in everything – love!”** understood this well. Sadly, they repeated over and over again that **“human dividers do not reach the Heaven”**.

**We do not renounce the particularities of our beliefs and ways of ministry. We choose, however, not to be locked up inside our denominational and confessional exclusivity.**

To be able to recommend a Christian agenda for Russia we need to rise above all the existing boundaries – confessional and national. Precisely in such a space the Evangelical movement is taking form.

This thesis does not suggest abolishing or fusing of the existing confessions and jurisdictions. On the contrary, true unity is impossible without different denominations that bring diversity. We need to rise above the limits of confessions. By doing that, we do not renounce the particularities of our beliefs and ways of ministry. We choose, however, not to be locked up inside our denominational and confessional exclusivity. We perceive

ourselves as a part of a larger process. Thus, we should see the general picture as well as our specific part in it.

The Evangelical work field is vast and not limited to ministers and denominations. It is primarily public and political.

The dogmatic<sup>10</sup>, hidden, mysterious<sup>11</sup>, and saving acts of the Church is lead within the framework of a denomination. However, denominations should not intrude into the public and political spheres. It is not so only because it contradicts the Biblical principle found in Mt 22:21 **“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”**, and the secular principle of separation of Church and state. It is so mostly because it destroys the essence of Christ’s Body.

Then what should we do? How are we **“to bring ... a sword”** (Mt 10:34) into the world without turning the Church into a distinct power connected by birth to Caesar’s office? For that very reason we proclaim the Evangelical movement.

The Evangelical movement is able and must act in a public political sphere because it is not a church connected office but a movement of Christians. It does not express opinions of certain denominations but a personal position of an individual. It is an area that is ruled by a person’s consciousness and the Word of God.

Such an approach allows us to fulfill the important Evangelical postulate of **separation**. The image of a body which Paul implements (Rom. 12; 1Cor:12) for the description of the Church is a living illustration of this principle. None of us has the complete set of the gifts. None of us can exist without the others. Every one of us has a special part in the Whole. The separation of the Evangelical movement from the denominational structures and strictly pastoral ministry (similar

<sup>10</sup> The word should be understood as *teaching of the tenets of faith*. (Translator’s note)

<sup>11</sup> Here this word has a double meaning. First, it should be understood as a sacramental life of the Church that is expressed in the baptism, Holy Communion, etc. Secondly, the word should be understood as a *mystical or mysterious* life of the Church. The life that cannot be explained by logic or science.

in principle to the separation of powers) allows avoidance of corruption and to become more effective in every aspect of the ministry.

### **Let us ask a question. How is Evangelical movement possible?**

Our paradigm is as follows:<sup>12</sup>

<b>S</b>	Sacrifice
<b>I</b>	Identity
<b>K</b>	Knowledge
<b>E</b>	Ethics

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<sup>12</sup> In Russian the beginning letters of the words spell "LIFE" *Translator's note.*

## **S** – Acceptance of a Sacrifice

Unity is not achieved through compromise but through the sacrifice of love.

A compromise implies mutual abandonment of some values for common goals. It is supposed that these values are secondary in nature by comparison to the other more important values. In reality, they are just as important. Otherwise, forsaking them would not be so painful. A compromise is not an agreement because every side is not completely satisfied and later on strives to regain what was lost. That is why a compromise is only a temporary solution, a temporary truce after which a new confrontation is unavoidable.

The genuine unity is achieved on the new level when varying views are understood as part of the more complex whole. In this case unity is definitely possible because each side sees its need in the other that supports a different part of the whole. This other part is no longer perceived as a threat or something insignificant. On the contrary, it is obvious that without the other, one cannot achieve the desired results in their fullness. At this level the differences are seen not as a confrontation, but as a mutual enrichment.

**We should sacrifice not the Truth but our own position in the society. We should not step over the principles but over the personal injuries, passions and ambitions.**

Yet it is impossible to achieve this level without a **sacrifice**, self-denial and the dismissal of our selfish pursuits. We should not give up our values but overcome ambitions, positions of superiority, all-knowing, and pride. Every time when we encounter a contradiction or disagreement God does not want a compromise from us, nor a denial of our values and convictions, but humility before others; our acceptance of them as equal and even more superior, and an eagerness to an open and respectful dialogue. By denying ourselves we open a way for God. We give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to raise us to a level on which our differences will be perceived as parts of the

whole.

Here we have in mind the Biblical mandate to every believer – humility. To be humble is to overcome pride. If you are humble then the unity is not an issue. It is already there – in Christ and through Him with all the others.

This moral command is not the only condition. We need a cognitive arrangement. We need a more advanced comprehension of our evangelical identity for this sacrifice to be possible.

## I – A More Complex Identity

In many instances our concept of identity is based on the principle “mine vs. alien (or other)”. Our identity is “negative”. We judge ourselves by the criteria according to which we differ from the others. If we use such an approach, dogma becomes a mere password which allows us to distinguish “mine” from the rest instead of being a “road map” to God. In this situation, marginalization is unavoidable. A militant spirituality is also unavoidable because all “who are not with us are against us”<sup>13</sup>.

The real and worthy unity does not emerge on the basis of a shared doctrine. There are many reasons why it happens. The main reason is that doctrine has another purpose. Its goal is to redirect an individual to God, to give him or her points of reference for spiritual growth, and to provide a safe heaven for a seeker. It is unacceptable to use doctrine for the basis of unity and separation.

True unity is possible only on the basis of “**shared values**”. These values have to be integrated into a way of living, thinking and acting. People with identical values are drawn towards each other and cooperate instantly even if there is a vast difference in their opinions and convictions. More so the shared values that have contrasting opinions allow various points of view on the same issue making collaboration more effective. At the same time differences in values alienate those who do not have any doctrinal conflicts.

The approach that is based on values allows for the “positive” identity where we may and should decide what is important and a must. In other words, it lets us talk about the essence of our movement without any regard to our similarities or differences from the others. Then we can formulate our own discourse and seek out allies. We can continue our Christian existence owing nothing to the rites performed exactly to the letter. Then we, whatever our denomination is, (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, Methodists, Presbyterian, or any other), can take on the responsibility for the local community as well as the Universal Church. We are able to lead a Universal life. Such an approach allows us to see Catholic and Orthodox Christians as brothers in Christ.

Thus, through affirmation of values we will overcome the marginalism and be able to keep the inakovost. That is why we should use the holistic approach based on values to form the Evangelical identity.

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<sup>13</sup> Metaphorically speaking marginalism is a self-imposed captivity. It is a state of being on the roadside of history

## **K** – Embracing Learning and Knowledge

It is absolutely essential and not a whim for today's Christian to have a wide range of up-to-date knowledge.

Incompetence and lack of professionalism long ago became our problems.<sup>14</sup> Here we are not necessarily talking about formal education, though to some degree about it as well, but about the ability to comprehend the essence of events in the society and about the ability to offer solutions that are acceptable to a contemporary individual. How else should one operate and have input in this world of scientific, technological and economic progress? Otherwise, Christians are destined to be either **trash collectors** or martyrs. Which one it could be depends on a political situation. In any case, Christians will be marginalized.

Is there a third possibility? The history of the Church shows that, indeed, there is. In order to do that the Church has to appropriate the deep well of knowledge that has been compiled by generations. The Church has to assimilate this knowledge in the light of the Evangelical values (in fact, to Christianize the wisdom of Gentiles) and use it to build and expand the Kingdom of God.

Today we have to re-organize this work. That is why the task to educate and be educated is urgent. We should approach it on every front – from self-education to the creation of formal institutions that are based on the Evangelical values. We should strongly contemplate an all-encompassing education if we want to have well-rounded individuals. The most important though are the following areas in education:

- **Higher education in humanities** will give us an opportunity to formulate our own discourse in the socio-political expanse of the Russian speaking world.
- **Higher Theological education** will lay a foundation for the Russian Evangelical Theological school.
- **Higher education in management** will provide the Evangelical movement with managerial knowledge.

In order to accomplish the goals mentioned above we should either create new institution or to do the work at the existing schools of high learning.

Knowledge in and of itself makes us “puff up” ( 1Cor. 8:1). It is an old Christian truth. That is why we cannot avoid the question: **How is knowledge to be balanced?**

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<sup>14</sup> In the former Soviet Union it was difficult for the followers of Christ to obtain a university degree. If the authority found out that a student was a Christian that student could be expelled from a university. On the other hand, many Evangelical churches treated the Higher education as evil coming from the Devil. “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong” (1Cor 1:27). Such a negative attitude to secular learning exists in many churches even today.

## **E** – Ethics

This is the only “security belt” of the movement.

A high moral standard is required by the life of every participant of the Evangelical movement. People do not believe the words one says but their actions and lifestyle. Our values are expressed in the way we live.

**The representatives of the true elite differ from the common men in their acting according to the law of honor rather than in submitting to the pressures of life.**

We are not talking here about the hypocritical blindness towards reality. Christ did not try to avoid the society of sinners while still Himself remaining holy. He broke many traditional rules but in so doing He revealed God’s Truth. The Lord was moved by love to people, not by a formal rule. We must not hide from the events happening in the world and in Russia but inject them with the reality of the Kingdom of God. In all circumstances we should be guided by the principle that **to be truly alive or to have the fullness of life in Christ internally is more important than to look “right” on the surface.**

Sacrifice, identity, knowledge, and ethics – these should be the main vestiges of the Evangelical movement.

These characteristics presuppose action otherwise they will remain but a mere declaration. From this we deduce the main demand to the Evangelical movement: **It must be active!**

## 4. Effective and active approach

### The Basic Condition of the Existence of the Evangelical Movement.

How do we respond to the eternally vital appeal of the prophet, "Make straight ... a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3)? Does this call touch only our hearts? Or should His Kingdom be fully revealed even in today's world? If we remain frozen while observing the world we definitely will be incapable of fulfilling His Great Commission!

We are called to be effective and active. This activity should not only be observed in the church sphere.

**The Kingdom of God should be integrated into today's culture and politics through the lives of our contemporaries who are the carriers of this Kingdom.**

To fulfill even some aspects of Heavenly Kingdom we must acquire the basic contemporary culture – the 'project culture'.

By giving life to great Christian projects we will be able to affirm certain Evangelical values in the society. We can bring about changes which are unattainable through preaching alone. Through active collaboration we can touch the hearts and minds of those by the Gospel who otherwise would not listen to us. People tend to begin trusting Christian believers while working on tasks together.

It is possible that actions that benefit the general public and humanity as a whole soon will become the main way of proclaiming the Gospel!

On the other hand, we should be careful because actions can become a temptation.

Let's reflect on the first temptation of Jesus in the desert (He was asked to turn stones into bread) which would open a possibility of an easy solution to human problems. Many of our churches are tempted by the all-consuming social work. Let's remember, brothers and sisters, that our Lord refused the offer of Satan by saying that "**Man shall not live on bread alone**" (Mt 4:4).

We must avoid the dangers of being stuck in social work. A Church that focuses primarily on the social work will be commended by the society that rejected Christ. Government will provide the necessary financial aid for these efforts just to keep the church occupied so that the Church stays away from being involved in the political and economical spheres of life. Everything would be done in such a way that the Evangelical churches know their place on the chessboard of the Caesar.

We can walk through this temptation and not fail, only when we accept "the order" for our activity from the Lord, not from an individual, the society, a corporation, Caesar, or an appointed official.

The voice of the Church should sound from the Heavens, but not from the appointment by someone's social niche. It should be heard by everybody, not by the assigned by someone social groups.<sup>15</sup>

Our ministry should be directed to meet human needs, but its focus should be only the Kingdom of God. It is this Kingdom that transforms an individual and the society by the power of the Holy Spirit. This way the Church will keep its stance as being **in the world but not of the world**, (John 17:15-16), fulfilling its prophetic mission.

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<sup>15</sup> In this sense the idea of canonical territory is an idea that is bureaucratic, that of the Third Rome, third class, and utterly alien to the Evangelical Spirit that is sternerly "blows wherever it pleases" (John 3:8)

In connection with the above we should answer an important question. What activity would become an expression of the Evangelical unity which will demonstrate and even encourage diversity?

## 5. Sobornost<sup>16</sup>

### A Form of the Expression of the Principle “Unity in Diversity”.

The connecting link of the Evangelical movement is the work of the Council and is done in the period between meeting of the Councils. Sobornost is an expression of the commandment about **the universal priesthood**. The Lord demands that all who belong to Christ perform the service as a priest unto God and to people. That is why He gave each of us an appropriate gift. In practice the majority of Christians either do not use their gifts at all or their God pleasing ministry is not acknowledged as priestly; neither by the believers nor by pastors and bishops.

As a result, the Church suffers because the burden of serving the world is carried out by a few. The world is suffering as well because God’s blessing is kept in the narrow circle of the faithful and not given out to the people. Also, an individual suffers; the one who does not serve the Lord daily. Too many talents are still buried. The human potential is not unleashed.<sup>17</sup>

The genuine service is not confined to a community of believers. Sobornost of the believers implies that every Christian, notwithstanding his or her rank or status within the community, is Christ’s priest sent into the world to serve. Doctors, teachers, rock musicians, journalists, businessmen, managers – all are potential messengers of God’s Kingdom. Their service is not always connected with ecclesiastical structures. If their sacrificial work is directed to promoting the Kingdom’s values it should be acknowledged as true service. Such acceptance will allow the Church to attract many uninvolved believers to the real and saving service. Only in this instance every day in the life of the Church will fulfill the principle of being a council.

**The service of an individual is not always connected with ecclesiastical structures. If their sacrificial work is directed to promoting the Kingdom’s values it should be acknowledged as true service.**

The genuine sobornost presupposes to have church councils on local, regional, and all Evangelical levels. The collective discussion of the life and ministry of the Church is a response to God’s calling to the active ministry and the fulfillment of the principle of the “universal priesthood”. In so doing we will uphold the diversity and at the same time keep the unity of the Church of Christ. Sobornost is the leading of the Holy Spirit and

<sup>16</sup> The word “Sobornost” does not have a precise equivalent in the English language like the word “Inakovost”. “Sobornost” is a term coined by the early Slavophiles, Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksey Khomyakov, to underline the need for cooperation between people at the expense of individualism on the basis that the opposing groups focus on what is common between them. Khomyakov believed the West was progressively losing its unity. According to Khomyakov this stemmed from the west embracing Aristotle and his defining individualism; whereas Kireevsky believed that Hegel and Aristotle represented the same ideal of unity. Khomyakov and Kireevsky originally used the term sobor to designate cooperation within the Russian obshchina, united by a set of common convictions and Orthodox Christian values, as opposed to the cult of individualism in the West.

Kireevsky asserted that “the sum total of all Christians of all ages, past and present, comprise one indivisible, eternal living assembly of the faithful, held together just as much by the unity of consciousness as through the communion of prayer”. The term in general means the unity, togetherness that is the church, based on individual like-minded interest.

Starting with Vladimir Soloviev, sobornost was regarded as the basis for the ecumenical movement within the Russian Orthodox Church. Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev, Pavel Florensky were notable proponents for the spirit of sobornost between different Christian factions (translator’s note, source: wikipedia.org).

<sup>17</sup> Using contemporary language we state the fact that, in essence, there is in place the process of *de-capitalization* of God’s people. We should note here that we ought not to refrain from using images of economy, words about enterprises and profit considering them unworthy of the miracles of the spiritual world. Jesus Himself used images from economy. The historical example of Seraphim of Sarov\* is very convincing. The holy elder used images and phrases from a dictionary for merchants to explain his spiritual children the truth of Christian faith.

\* Saint **Seraphim of Sarov** (1759-1833) is one of the most renowned Russian monks and mystics. He is know for his monastic teachings on contemplation, on theory, and self-denial for laypeople. He taught that the purpose of a Christian life is to receive the Holy Spirit. He was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1903 (a note by the translator).

the fulfillment of the Apostles' principle formulated during the First Council in Jerusalem “**It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us**” (Acts 15:28).

The leading of the Holy Spirit breathes into the life of the Church the power that allows it to be **the salt and the light** in this world, to be the prophetic voice of the people, and to carry into the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is precisely how the discussed and accomplished principle was fulfilled during the First Evangelical Council of 2010 “***In unity there is power, in diversity there is freedom!***” Amen.

Interim Office of the Evangelical Council  
Summer 2010 A.D.

**Interim Office**

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