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## **THE EMERGENCE OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN BELARUS (THE LATE XIX<sup>TH</sup> – EARLY XX<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)<sup>1</sup>**

*The article deals with the rising process of Evangelical movement in Belarus in the late XIXth – early XX<sup>th</sup> centuries: its main stages and the factors of its spread are determined with the help of supporting source material. The geopolitical changes which took place during I World War and Russian revolutions are viewed as the triggers for the movement development. They created the conditions for the spread of the movement, and at the same time formed various political and legal conditions for the development of the movement in the BSSR and Western Belarus.*

**Keywords:** *Protestantism, Evangelical movement, Baptists, Stundists, Adventism, Methodism, sects, Western Belarus, religious policy.*

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## **ЗАРОЖДЕНИЕ ЕВАНГЕЛЬСКОГО ДВИЖЕНИЯ В БЕЛАРУСИ (КОНЕЦ XIX – НАЧАЛО XX ВВ.)**

*Статья посвящена процессу зарождения евангельского движения в Беларуси в конце XIX – начале XX века: выделены основные этапы, факторы распространения, представлен источниковый материал. В качестве триггеров развития движения определены геополитические изменения, произошедшие в ходе Первой мировой войны и русских революций, которые создали условия для распространения движения, но в то же время сформировали разные политико-правовые условия развития движения в БССР и в Западной Беларуси.*

**Ключевые слова:** *поздний протестантизм, евангельское движение, баптизм, штундизм, адвентизм, сектантство, Западная Беларусь, религиозная политика.*

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<sup>1</sup> Статья публикуется в авторской редакции.

**Introduction.** The end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> centuries marks an upsurge of the Protestant movement: the number of its adherents gradually increases, their activities liven up and acquire an institutionalized character, and new Protestant denominations appear in America at the beginning of the century. At this stage, active development is characteristic mainly of Evangelical denominations (late Protestant persuasions): Evangelicalism, Baptism, the Church of Christ, Pentecostal movement, Methodism, and Adventism. Gradually the rise of the Protestant movement widely embraces European countries, and the Belarusian lands take part in the world process of spreading and developing late Protestantism. The topicality of studying the process of Evangelical denominations rise in Belarus in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is conditioned by the fact that during this period there took place certain changes in the religious structure of Belarusian society, and there emerged new factors revealing the tendency towards institutionalization of Evangelical denominations as a religious minority. Moreover, there occurred a progressive change of the religious landscape of Belarus against the background of geopolitical changes, transformations of political systems and, correspondingly, of denominational policy. This change determined the present-day regional denominational distribution in Belarus.

**The rise and spread of *Evangelicals* in Belarusian lands at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> centuries in the framework of the Russian Empire**

For the first time the followers of Evangelicals (in the form of Stundism) in the Belarusian lands were discovered in Gomel district, Mogilev province in 1870. In the 1880s Stundists appeared in Rogachyov district, Mogilev province, as well as in the number of settlements in Vitebsk province [21, p. 198]. When Stundists was declared to be outlawed in 1894, however, the Stundist movement began to decline, and later on practically merged with the Baptist movement.

The emergence of the Baptist movement in Belarusian lands took place in the context of developing Russian and Western European Baptist movement. Being conditioned by the geographical and political location of the

Belarusian territories (being part of the Russian State until 1918), the movement was closely connected with the activities of Russian and Ukrainian missionaries (I. Ryaboshapka, in particular), as well as German missionaries (K. Ondra, the bursar of a community in Lodz, who was at the head of a community in Volyn for some years) [2, p. 104–105]. It is considered that the first Baptist community on the territory of Belarus was that of the village Oot, Gomel district, set up in the 1870s, whose presbyters were N. Kopenkov, U. Kopenkov, D. Revzenkov, M. Kiryushchenko [18, p. 382]. In 1879–1882, a community was set up in the village Usokhi, Gomel district, which embraced 95 members in 1885 [34, p. 289].

According to the First All-Russian census of 1897, 151 Baptists were known to live in Belarusian provinces in the late XIX<sup>th</sup> century (the term Baptist was used to denote a representative of Evangelicals – Stundists, Baptists and others), including 130 people in Vitebsk province, 14 – in Mogilev province, 5 – in Minsk province, and 2 – in Grodno province. Nobody admitted the adherence to the Baptist denomination in Vilno province [33]. It should be noted that the notions of “Stundism”, “Stundo-Baptists” and “Baptists” were used as synonyms in the official discourse and pre-revolutionary historiography having a generalizing meaning. Furthermore, these denominations were often identified under the general name “sects”, which was attributed afterwards to other late Protestant movements (Pentecostalism, Methodism and Adventism). Correspondingly, while counting the number of adherents of late Protestant denominations the First All-Russian census of 1897 listed the followers of both Baptist and Stundist movements under the “Baptists” nomination.

At the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century Baptists continued to gradually penetrate into the territories of Belarusian provinces. In Minsk province Baptist communities were formed in Retchitsa, Slutsk and Pinsk districts. The largest of them was the community in the farm Khatki, Retchitsa district, which embraced about 50 families [27, p. 65]. In 1905, the first community was founded in Polesye, in the town Pruzhany, which consisted of several dozen people [11, p. 13; 18, p. 382]. A. Vereshchagina cites the information that up to 500 Baptist believers

lived in Mogilev province in 1906 [18, p. 663]. The report on the state of affairs in Mogilev diocese in 1908 specified that Baptist communities were in close contact with the Ukrainian Baptist movement, and that preachers came there from Kiev, and the communities received certain material aid [8, p. 49].

In north-western parts of Belarus, in the territories of Belostok, Grodno, Vilno, Baptist communities emerged later than in the east and south of Belarus. In 1902, a community was organized in Kovno. The sphere of missionary work of Kovno community included all Belarusian, Polish and Lithuanian borderline areas. Due to its activities, new communities were set up in Vilno, Belostok and Volozhin. In the research into the history of the Baptist movement in the pre-revolutionary period, A. Milovidov points to the German origin of Baptists in Belarusian-Lithuanian provinces in the early XX<sup>th</sup> century [24, p. 7]. The first missionaries and community presbyters in Kovno and Belostok in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were of German origin (O. Lenza, K. Schlosser). Nevertheless, the further development of the Baptist movement in these lands was connected with the activities of Latvian missionaries.

The active development of Protestantism at that stage was hindered by anti-Protestant (“anti-sectarian”) policy of Russia in the late XIX<sup>th</sup> – early XX<sup>th</sup> centuries which took the form of persecuting Baptist adherents and expelling the movement leaders abroad (V. Fetler, V. Pashkov, M. Korff and others) [7, p. 26]. Under the tsar’s edict of July 4, 1894, “Stundists”, which implied all new Protestant denominations, were declared to be outlawed [19, p. 122]. This resulted in persecuting the followers of both Stundist and Baptist movements, in quite often exiling them to the central regions of Russia, and in restraining the spread of the movement. Thus, 52 Stundists in Mogilev province, for instance, converted to Orthodoxy [19, p. 105].

Only after the issue of the Supreme Edict of Nicholas II “On the liberal attitude towards religion” on April 17, 1905 [9, p. 110-115], that the activities of Protestants were legalized. It gave an opportunity to carry out missionary work and spread the doctrine in all the territories of the Russian Empire, which contributed to the organization of new communities.

In Vitebsk province, Baptists had already appeared by 1911 in Dvinsk, Lyutzin, Drissa,

Rezhitzha and Vitebsk districts. The Baptist community in Vitebsk included 10 adherents headed by presbyter Hugo Shengardt [28, p. 17, 19-19, 20], the community being registered in 1914 [19, p. 193]. In Dvinsk there was a Baptist community numbering 20 adherents which had moved away from Lutheranism [28, p. 15]. On the whole, the information possessed by the police and the Orthodox clergy concerning Vitebsk province testified to the fact that 136 Baptists lived in Dvinsk district, 53 people in Lyutzin district, one family in Drissa District, while no exact data were given concerning Rezhitzha and Vitebsk districts [20, p. 15.].

In 1913, a Baptist community functioned in Minsk embracing 23 believers, mainly of peasant origin. The police recorded that the community in Minsk maintained active relations with two centres of spreading the Baptist doctrine in the Russian Empire: in Ukraine (through Artyukhov, who kept in touch with the community in the village Obody, Sumy district, Kharkov province) and St. Petersburg (through Tatjana Petrova, a Kolpino, a petty bourgeois, who came to Minsk in April, 1913 and maintained contacts with Baptists in Kolpino and St. Petersburg) [27, pp. 62-65].

In 1908, a Baptist community emerged in Gomel. [20, p. 15; 29, p. 383].

In 1910, there were two Baptist communities in Grodno province: in Belostok (numbering more than 30 people) and in the township Khoroshchi (with about 20 people) which was visited by a preacher from Kovno. A non-registered community functioned in the village Shkudy [20, p. 29]. The Evangelical Christian Baptist community in Grodno was founded later by Latvian missionaries. On the whole, the development of the Baptists at the north-western borders of Belarusian lands in the early XX<sup>th</sup> century was exceptionally connected with the activities of William Fetler, a missionary of Latvian origin who got a religious education in America and Petersburg [2, p. 119]. Fetler first visited Grodno believers in 1906, and later he interceded for the community registration with the state authorities but his request was declined [18, p. 384]. According to unofficial information, non-registered Baptist communities existed before 1910 in other settlements of Grodno province [24, p. 6].

The liberalization of religious legislation in the Russian Empire resulted in enlivening the

religious life and contributed to the development and gradual institutionalization of Russian Evangelical Baptist movement. The official separation of Evangelical Christian denomination from Russian Baptist movement took place in 1908 when the organization of Evangelical Christians headed by I. Prokhanov was officially registered in Petersburg [5, p. 124]. The first followers of this denomination, even before its official legalization, were discovered in 1882 in Chechersk, Gomel district, Mogilev province, in the estate of Countess Chertkova, where evangelical meetings were held [18, p. 336]. The first community of Evangelical Christians in the vicinity of the Belarusian-Ukrainian border was set up in Kovel in 1909. The Evangelical Christian doctrine propagated by the community members in Kovel (in 1915-1919, in particular), soon embraced Volyn and Belarusian Polesje where Belarusian Evangelical Christian communities were organized [5, p. 128]. In 1912, the communities belonging to the Union of Evangelical Christians appeared in Bobrujsk district, Mogilev province, first in villages and then in the town Bobrujsk. M. R. Veresov became its first presbyter [34].

It should be noted that the development of this denomination in Russia and Ukraine played a considerable role in its spreading in Belarusian lands. In contrast to Russian and Central Ukrainian communities, the formation of the Evangelical Christian movement took place not in the Baptist environment. The communities of Evangelical Christians arose mainly independently of the Baptist movement, without any assistance, under the influence of Russian and Ukrainian movement of Evangelical Christians, yet some instances of Baptist communities being renamed as Evangelical Christian communities were also recorded. Thus, the documents of 1914 make mention of a community of Evangelical Christians in Vitebsk, under the guidance of Hugo Shengardt [19, p. 192], which in other earlier documents appears as a Baptist one [28, pp. 19-19 об.].

The genesis of Adventist movement in Belarusian lands is connected with the expansion of the movement in Europe, particularly with its spread in Germany, Austria and especially in Russia. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Adventist movement from Switzerland reached Germany, and later Russia and Austria. The first mention of Adventists in Russia goes

back to 1897. Since 1908 Adventist communities were united to form the Russian Union of the International church of Seventh-day Adventists, which functioned in Belarusian lands as well. In 1910, the government of Vilno province registered the Adventist community of 12 people. In 1911, the authorities consented to Adventist meetings being held in Minsk, where a community sprang up which embraced 16 followers, according to official records [30, pp. 15, 64].

No precise information about the number of Evangelicals communities in Belarusian lands before I World War is available, but the governor records of Polesje province characterizing the “sectarian” movement point out that eight Baptist communities existed in the North-Western territory in 1910, the largest of them being Stundist-Baptist communities (mainly in Volyn and Pinsk districts [14, p. 13]. Besides, according to A. Milovidov’s estimate, 8 Baptist communities the North-Western territory consisted of some 230 members in 1910; there were two permanent meeting-houses, two preachers without special Baptist schools and other educational establishments [24, p. 6].

The analysis of Evangelical-Baptist movement extension in the late XIX<sup>th</sup> – early XX<sup>th</sup> centuries makes it possible to admit the influence of three centres, which spread the Baptist movement in the Russian Empire, on the development of the movement in Belarusian provinces: the Ukrainian centre (in Mogilev province, in Minsk community, in Polesje), the Baltic centre (in Vitebsk and Grodno provinces), and that in Petersburg (in Minsk community). It should also be mentioned that the rise of new Protestant denominations in the western regions of Belarus in the late XIX<sup>th</sup> – early XX<sup>th</sup> centuries occurred later than in the eastern ones. While the first Stundist communities already functioned in Gomel district, Vitebsk and Mogilev provinces in the 1870s [15, c. 61], in the western regions Baptist and Stundist ideas only began to germinate in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The further development of Baptist and other late Protestant denominations in Western Belarus was primarily connected with the spread of Protestantism through Western Ukrainian, Polish and Baltic lands, in contrast to the eastern part of Belarus which maintained close contacts with Russian lands

and was greatly influenced by Russian Protestantism.

**The development of *Evangelical* movements in the context of geopolitical changes and political transformation of the Belarusian society**

The development of Evangelicals in Belarus in the 1920-30s was greatly influenced by the geopolitical changes which took place in the course of World War I and Russian revolutions, and particularly by the establishment of the Soviet regime as well as the signing of Riga peace treaty according to which Belarusian territories were divided into two parts

**The development of Evangelical movement in the BSSR**

The first years of the Soviet power in Central and Eastern Belarus are characterized by the growth of Evangelicals communities due to the re-emigration process after the end of World War I. The community in the village Cheremissy, Bragin district, for instance, was set up owing to the activity of D. Shinkarenko, who had returned from German captivity where he adopted the new faith. In 1930, the community had 60 members. The community of Evangelical Christians in Vitebsk was headed by I. Tarasyuk who had returned from Germany after the war and a two-year course of studies [13, pp. 101, 106, 108]. In the village Trilessino, Belynichy district, K.Paluda and Kononov brothers, the believers who had also adopted the Evangelical faith in German captivity, started missionary work after their return to the native land. In 1925, their community included as many as 25 people.

The communities of Evangelical Christian Baptists sprang up progressively in other regions of the BSSR: in 1919, a community of Evangelical Christian Baptists was set up in the village Yelnya, Krasnopolje district, in 1922 – in the village Kletki, Kostyukovichy district, in 1922-1923 – six communities in Mstislavl, Shklov, Osipovichy and other districts, in 1924 – in Bobrujsk [18].

The number of Evangelical Christian communities rose as well: in 1920, some believers left the community of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Vitebsk and formed a community of Evangelical Christians with I. Tarasyuk at its head [13, p. 101]. In 1924, two communities functioned in Minsk headed by presbyters V. Chechnev and B. Cheberuk [18, p.

385], whereas the community started to function in Koydanovo district in 1925 [19, p. 195].

According to the official data presented by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, there were 46 communities of “sect members” (numbering 2584 people) in the BSSR in 1925 [25, p. 5], and in the early 1930s there were already 86 Evangelical communities in the BSSR [26, p. 15].

It should be admitted, however, that the Soviet government held a certain course in the sphere of state-denominational relations while the Soviet regime was in the making. It was a course of shaping their religious policy in the context of aggressive secularization aimed at excluding religion from social awareness by adopting a number of restrictive measures. The latter meant that in the 1920s and early 1930s the Central Executive Committee (the Central Executive Committee Presidium) passed a number of Directives on the land tenure of religious cults, on the registration of religious societies, on the use and insurance of meeting-houses, on the confiscation of church valuables, etc. [16, p. 78].

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party Organizational Bureau of September 27, 1926, set the task of eliminating sectarianism once and for all. The Resolution of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR “On religious unions” of April 8, 1929, confirmed the restraints on the activities of religious organizations in public sphere and prohibited any expression of religious propaganda and activities outside cult buildings (with the exception of visiting sick and dying people, with a special permit). Religious organizations were forbidden to hold meetings for children, women, young people, devotional and other kinds of meetings, as well as to set up religious education groups. The Resolution confirmed the permissive principle of registering communities, and the state organs of power got the right to intervene in the home affairs of organizations. In such legal realities, the religious activity of communities shifted from the public sphere to the private (closed) one, cult buildings were withdrawn from private and passed to state property, active anti-religious propaganda was

launched, as well as repressions concerning believers.

Under such conditions some communities were forced to go over to an illegal status, and in 1937, all the registered communities of Evangelical Christian Baptists in the BSSR were officially liquidated [19, p. 195], and the majority of presbyters were repressed.

#### **The development of Evangelical movement in Western Belarus**

After the signing of Riga peaceful treaty Western Belarusian territories went to Poland which determined different conditions for the religious sphere development from those in the eastern part of Belarus. The transformation of religious legislation of the II Rzecz Pospolita in the interwar period was aimed at shaping an identification model of state-denominational relations which confirmed the equality of all religious beliefs with the dominant position of Catholic Church thus legalizing the activities of religious minorities. Furthermore, the Supreme Edict of Nicholas II “On the liberal attitude towards religion” of April 17, 1905, remained valid in the lands of Western Belarus [23, p. 70] as well as the Edict “On sects that dropped out of Orthodoxy” of November 11, 1906 regarding Evangelicals [9, pp. 110–115].

The reservation of Russian religious legislation validity enabled Belarusian Protestant communities to have quite a wide range of rights and powers for carrying out both private and public activities [4, pp. 289–316]. This situation contributed to the development process of Evangelicals in Western Belarus in the 1920s-1930s: there followed a rapid increase in the number of communities and adherents, new forms of religious and non-religious activities developed. This period marked the appearance and active spread of denominations which were quite new in Belarusian lands: Pentecostalism, Methodism, Church of Christ and others.

Pentecostalism came to the west of Belarus, Ukraine and the eastern lands of Poland much later than the Baptists – only in the early 1920s, which was connected mainly with its later appearance. Pentecostalism reached Belarusian lands by two ways – from the north via Finland and Petersburg, and from the south – via Odessa and Western Ukrainian lands. The earlier northern Pentecostal movement was represented by “Evangelical Christians in Apostolic Spirit” (“smorodintsy”), that settled down in Poland and

Volyn in the 1920s [17, pp. 18–24]. The first Evangelical Christians in Apostolic Spirit community headed by Ignat Kazachy was set up in Belarusian lands in the village Stradechi, Breat district [6, pp. 34–35]. Before the middle 1920-th the community in Stradechy had become the leading community of Evangelical Christians in Apostolic Spirit in Western Belarusian and Ukrainian lands.

The southern direction of Pentecostalism connected with Odessa – “Christians of Evangelical Belief” (pentecostals) arose in Western Belarus in the early 20s. The centre of CEB movement in Belarusian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Western Polish lands was the town Kremenets, Volyn province [6, pp. 34–35]. From the latter CBE movement spread to the territories of Brest and Pinsk districts, and later to other Belarusian territories.

The spread of Methodism in Belarusian lands began as late as 1920 and was connected with the Methodist Mission activities («Methodist Mission of America Committee for Poland») – an affiliate of the South-African Methodist church founded in 1920 for providing assistance to World War I victims [1, p. 205]. The Mission began its work with purely humanitarian aid gradually shifting its activities to the popularization of Methodism. Nevertheless, Methodism did not manage to spread widely in the western lands of the II Rzecz Pospolita in the 1920s-1930s. It became established mainly in Belarusian-Lithuanian borderline areas (Vilno, Grodno, Radashkovichi) due to close contacts with Belarusian national movement whose representatives were found primarily in those territories.

In the 1920s, there arose one of the largest Protestant denominations of Evangelical Baptist persuasion – Church of Christ. Unlike other Protestant movements, Church of Christ appeared in Belarus independently of this movement development in the neighbouring countries. Its development was connected with the activities of a re-emigrant missionary K. Yaroshevich, who came from the USA in 1923 as a representative of the World Christian Mission [12, p. 70]. The first Church of the Christ community was organized in the village Staraya Vesj, Belostok province [3, pp. 25–28]. From 1924, the town Kobrin became the centre of the movement, in which K. Yaroshevich united with the Protestant group of T. Yakimuk.

In 1925, K. Yaroshevich joined Yan Bukovich, a graduate of a Biblical college in America, and founded a religious union under the title “Mission of Evangelical Christians in Poland” which was soon given a new name – the “Association of Christ Churches of Evangelical Belief in Poland” [10, p. 28]. The movement spread owing to its active missionary work in Vilno, Novogrudok, Polessje, as well as Volyn, Lyublin and Lvov provinces.

During the 1920s, the number of adherents of new Protestant denominations rapidly increases. In 1923, the membership of neo-Protestant communities amounted to 1 453 people, in 1924 – 2 328, in 1925 – 3 074, in 1926 – 4 187 people. The number of community members increased 6 times within the period of 1922-1927. The growth rates of the number of followers constituted 74% in 1923, 60% – in 1924, in 1925 – 32%, in 1926 – 36%. In the following years, the growth rates decrease: in 1927, the number of community members increased by 21%, during two years (from 1927 to 1929), the number of Protestants, according to various estimates, increased by 47–52%. In 1929, the number of neo-Protestantism adherents (amenably to various data) was from 7 433 to 7 807 people [22, p. 81].

By the mid-20s, the appearance of new Protestant denominations in Western Belarusian lands comes to an end, the structure of Belarusian Protestantism takes its shape embracing traditional Protestant denominations – Lutheranism and Calvinism; denominations of Evangelical-Baptist persuasion – Evangelical Christian Baptists, Church of Christ; Pentecostalism – Christians of Evangelical belief, Evangelical Christians in Apostolic Spirit; Adventist denomination in the form of Seventh-day Adventism; Methodism. The further development of Protestantism in Western Belarus in the 1920s-1930s is characterized by inner structural changes, a rapid growth of the number of its adherents, revitalization and expansion of the field of activity, and institutionalization of Belarusian Protestantism.

**Conclusion.** It is obvious that the rise of Evangelicals in Belarusian lands takes place in the late XIX<sup>th</sup>-early XX<sup>th</sup> centuries. The period of the development of new Protestant denominations on the territories of Belarus (before 1939) can be divided on two parts. During the first stage (from end of XIX<sup>th</sup> century

to the end of I World War) a gradual penetration of Evangelical movement through neighboring countries, mainly Baptists, Adventism, the first communities far from being numerous are set up. The liberalization of Russian religious legislation in 1905 caused the enlivening of the movement, but it is worth stating that the most active period in the development of Protestant denominations was from 1918 to 1939.

It should be noted that the appearance and spread of new Protestant denominations in Belarus occurred in the context of European and global development and was conditioned by an upsurge of the world Protestant movement, population migrations in the early XX<sup>th</sup> century, in the course of which the population got actively acquainted with the new faith, and active internal and external missionary work.

The geopolitical and political changes which took place during World War I and the Russian revolutions, and particularly the establishment of the Soviet regime as well as the signing of Riga peace treaty, according to which Belarusian territories were divided into two parts, became the main triggers and played a crucial role in the development of Evangelical movement.

Firstly, special mention should be made of the changed orientation of Belarusian Protestantism from the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas the development of Protestantism in the period of the late XIX<sup>th</sup> century-the early 1920s depended on the development of the movement in the Russian Empire and was mainly oriented towards Russian and Ukrainian centres, starting with the early 1920s, Belarusian communities left the sphere of influence of Russian Protestant centres and found themselves in the sphere of activity of European religious organizations. This process was conditioned by the division of Belarus into western and eastern parts, the annexation of Western Belarus to Poland, active anti-religious campaigns in the Soviet Russia and the establishment of the “iron curtain” in 1929. All these factors resulted in the change of the organizational orientation of Western Belarusian communities towards the west. The institutionalization process of the movement, the fact of Western Belarusian communities joining Polish and European organizations strengthened the international connections of the communities, created the possibility of close cooperation and enabled

foreign organizations to actively participate in the development of the Belarusian movement, which became one of the factors of active development of Evangelicals in Western Belarus.

Secondly, the geopolitical transformations and the strategy differentiation of the religious policy in the BSSR and Western Belarus, the processes of the movement development predetermined the shaping of the present-day landscape of the Evangelical movement. The prevailing trend of spatial distribution in the general structure of Belarusian denominational sphere until the 1990s was the western-eastern regionalization vector [32, p. 18] characterized by the pronounced religiosity of the western region, a great number of religious communities available there, and a gradual decrease of the indicators in question towards the eastern border of Belarus. The situation is conditioned by the fact that religious processes were suspended in the BSSR territory while in Western Belarus one could observe active religious life and the formation of the religious structure on account of new religious factors, namely Evangelicals. Consequently, a “strong territorial framework” of the main denominations was created in the western region before II World War, and it remained till the end of the XX<sup>th</sup> century notwithstanding the atheistic orientation of the religion policy in and interdenominational relations in the postwar period [31, pp. 90–96]. At the same time, the active secularization process in Western Belarus as a constituent part of the state ideological doctrine in the USSR determined to a great extent the regional peculiarities of the population religiosity and the measure of developing the denominational infrastructure in the early XXI<sup>st</sup> century.

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