

people, but over against this stands ever the Master's command: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you."

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## Baptists in Continental Europe.

### A Survey and an Appeal.

*The Baptist Commissioner for Europe is issuing this statement simultaneously in America.*

**B**APTISTS have in Europe a magnificent opportunity; British Baptists in one degree, and in still larger degree, American Baptists are rising to it. It is not that they are called upon to send over large numbers of missionaries. Only in two or three countries would the presence of foreigners be of advantage, and even in those exceptional cases it is to be hoped that ere long native leadership will suffice.

It is indeed a distinctive feature of the Baptist movement in the "old continent" that it has almost everywhere depended from the outset upon native workers. To a large extent it has arisen as a result of the simple reading of the New Testament, without the intervention of any human expositor or preacher. The most influential of all leaders in continental Europe has been Johann Gerhard Oncken, and in this respect he is typical. He was converted as a youth in England, but when he returned to his native land as a colporteur and evangelist he had not yet come into contact with Baptists. It was his keen interest in the Book he sold, and his constant perusal of its pages, that led him to withhold his first child from "christening" and soon afterwards to reach the definite conviction that it was his duty to be baptized as a believer. He waited five years for a "Philip," until Professor Sears of Newton came to Hamburg. The date (April 22, 1834) when Oncken was baptized with his wife and four other persons, in the river Elbe, may fairly be regarded as the birthday of the modern Baptist movement east of the North Sea. There were already in France and elsewhere tiny groups of Baptists that had come

into existence since the beginning of the century, but these were practically negligible, nor have they since displayed any remarkable energy. In Oncken, however, a man of genius had appeared, a great gift of God to his generation, and his vast energy and skill in organization furnished a new impetus and laid broad and deep the foundations of a new Evangelical Reformation.

It is not my purpose to trace, in this brief article, the history of the religious awakening that began in Hamburg, and whose effects have extended throughout the whole of the German-speaking world and far beyond. From the North Sea to the Ural Mountains, and from the North Cape to the Balkans, there is no considerable body of Baptists that is not indebted directly or indirectly to Oncken's work and influence. In most countries the earliest preachers were won and baptized by his missionaries.

An outstanding quality of this pioneer-evangelist was, his power of impressing upon the members of the churches he founded the obligations of the Great Commission. A well-known anecdote sets this in relief. Oncken, a few years after he had commenced his life work as a Baptist, was once asked: "How many missionaries have you?" He gave in reply the number of *members* then registered. His questioner explained: "You misunderstood me; I asked how many missionaries, not how many members," but Oncken calmly rejoined: "With us there is no difference: *every member is a missionary.*" So we find artisans, peasants, clerks and others bearing their witness; the movement has progressed and still progresses not merely through organized effort but through the spontaneous activity of individuals. And, as we have already noted, in not a few instances the experience of Oncken himself has been repeated; the Book itself without the preacher has called Baptist communities into being.

Let me cite a few figures to illustrate the remarkable numerical growth of the denomination in continental Europe. Then are of course merely approximate:

In the year 1800 there was no Baptist church on the mainland of Europe.

In the year 1850 there were about 4,000 church members.

In the year 1900 the number had risen to about 220,000.

In the year 1922 it is certainly more than 1,250,000, and perhaps approaches 2,000,000.

Such figures with the accelerated rate of growth in recent years, amply justify the description of the Baptist movement in Europe as "the most significant spiritual fact of our time."

The full meaning of the foregoing totals appears only when they are analysed. Continental Europe is not a homo-

geneous unity, but a most diversified complex of races, languages and conditions. Amid all the variety, however, the broad fact stands out that the Gospel as presented by our denomination is securing a hold everywhere. Its progress is comparatively slow in some Roman Catholic lands: Bavaria, Austria, Italy, France and Spain do not reveal such striking advance as is elsewhere apparent. Yet in these lands a firm foothold has been secured, and the future is bright with promise.

Consider a few of the peoples among whom the message is securing wide acceptance:

(1) Among the Scandinavians of Northern Europe—Denmark, Norway and Sweden—there is not only numerical progress but a firm organization which guarantees further advance. In no European country is our position so solidly established as in SWEDEN. Its 70,000 Baptist members represent a larger percentage of the total population than is found in any other country east of the Atlantic, except possibly Russia, and they include men of distinction and influence. The Swedish Baptists celebrate in 1923 the seventy-fifth anniversary of the foundation of their first church, and the occasion will be marked by the holding of the third Baptist World Congress in their capital city of Stockholm. It is to be hoped that multitudes of British Baptists will visit Stockholm next July to share in their brethren's joy.

(2) A sharp contrast to the cultured Scandinavians of the North is presented by the Latin RUMANIANS of the South-East, simple peasant folk for the most part. Of these, however, during the last five and twenty years, many thousands have been won to the Baptist faith and have proved their fidelity by a brave stand against continuous pestering as well as serious outbreaks of persecution.

(3) The inhabitants of the two republics of Esthonia and Latvia on the Baltic coast are markedly different in race, language, and culture. The ESTS are a people of Mongol descent, akin to the Finns, with scant literature, somewhat uncouth and prone to extremes of vices. The LETTS are of Aryan descent; they have a wealth of poetry, especially lyrical, and are among the most advanced of the nationalities once subject to Russia. But in responsiveness to the Baptist message and in the rapidity of Baptist advance there is nothing to choose between the two peoples.

(4) Of all Slav nationalities in Europe the most fully developed is the Bohemian. CZECHO-SLOVAKIA is the restored, and enlarged Bohemia, and the religious ferment in Czecho-Slovakia is appropriate to the land that produced John Hus and Jerome of Prague, and later the Moravian Brethren. For

years Bohemian men and women had been leaving the Roman Catholic Church; recently a large number of these seceders have united to form the semi-Protestant "Czecho-Slovakian National Church," but multitudes have merely floundered in negation. Now the Baptists are getting hold of these. The denomination has in its rapid advance outstripped at least three others during the past two years. Its membership includes not only Czechs and Slovaks, but Germans and Magyars, and a short time ago the Czecho-Slovak Baptist Union was able to make the proud boast that it is the only organization in the land which includes in perfect harmony "all the four nationalities."

(5) It is scarcely necessary to speak of the well-organized and comparatively long established German movement. But it is worth while to record that within the past two years entirely new developments have appeared in POLAND. When Dr. Brooks and myself visited that land early in 1920 we were disappointed to discover that the "Polish Baptists" of whom we had heard had in reality no existence. The churches in Poland were exclusively German-speaking, were led by German-speaking pastors, and were making their appeal only to the German-speaking minority. No impression had been made upon the Poles proper—the Slavs and Roman Catholics forming the majority, and apparently the Pole was more difficult to win than any other European. But it can now be reported as a result of new methods of approach that within recent months several hundreds of Slavs have been baptized as converts from Roman Catholicism.

(6) HUNGARY is remarkable as being inhabited by a race without any near relation in Europe. The Magyar stands alone, and often bitterly bemoans his friendlessness. But these people, so sharply distinguished from all around, have shown themselves equally sensitive to the Gospel. The problem in Hungary is to find buildings to accommodate the thousands who desire to worship and to listen to the preaching of the Word. The Seminary at Budapest recently opened and maintained by Southern Baptists is doing much towards meeting the needs of trained leaders.

(7) But of all lands RUSSIA furnishes the most striking illustrations of Baptist advance. It is difficult to give precise figures, since Russians are far less interested in statistics than ourselves and far less concerned if organization should be somewhat loose. There is also among certain of the simpler brethren a curious objection to gathering statistics, based on the Scriptural account of David's sin in "numbering the people." It is nevertheless possible to report certain striking facts. I noticed recently in scanning a report on relief work

in a small district of Southern Russia that there were within this limited area no fewer than sixty churches of our faith and order. In all parts of the famine-region, relief work has involved contact with large numbers of Baptists. In one Russian city not long since there were baptized on a single day more converts than on the day of Pentecost. In the middle of the year 1914 the best information I could obtain (for inclusion in a little book then preparing) put the number of baptized believers in Russia (including both "Evangelical Christians" and "Baptists") at 106,000; in 1922 the most conservative estimate of the strength of these bodies (which now have accepted a common declaration of faith and order) gives it as 1,000,000; whilst a less cautious but equally well-informed authority puts it as high as 2,000,000. Certainly there has been, and is, a movement of enormous strength—by far the most important religious movement in Russia. It appears clearly the will of God that Baptists should play a decisive part in shaping the future of that vast land.

We see then that responsiveness is not restricted to any one nation or any one racial group. Our message is making its successful appeal to men of all types and conditions.

Why is it that such progress is taking place? The explanation must be sought in the distinctive characteristics of our Baptist testimony, in our historic and fundamental principles. Let us recall in what guise Christianity has heretofore been known to many nations of Europe. Normally it has been presented in the guise of a great ecclesiastical organization closely allied with the State. The Protestant Church in Germany for example, was of this kind. It was intensely conservative in the political sense, militaristic, imperialistic. Few of its pastors ventured to display the slightest sympathy with any democratic movement or with any effort towards social or political reform. For the common man, the chief message of the church was an exhortation to respect the established order. It is small wonder that the working people of Germany turned away from such Christianity. In fact, from the point of view of Prussian politicians, the church was no more than a refined police force acting in the interests of the State.

It is scarcely necessary to refer to the general character of the Roman Catholic Church. Its long history reveals a persistent antagonism to freedom of every kind. No marvel that it has lost the allegiance of multitudes who refused to walk in blinkers and to submit mind and conscience to the dictates of a priesthood. Small wonder that President Masaryk regards as the twin foes of his long-oppressed nation "Vienna and Rome"—the Hapsburg dynasty and the Papacy.

But in my judgment the severest condemnation of any great historic church is that which must fall upon the Oriental Orthodox Church. This church has never had a Reformation. In the course of its history ritual has continuously received increased emphasis. Prostrations, the kissing of icons, pilgrimages to shrines, have become the characteristic expressions of piety. Among the masses superstition abounded, akin in quality to that of the medieval pre-Reformation church of the West. For centuries the two great factors operating upon the Russian people were politically the Czarist regime and religiously the Orthodox Church, the two acting in close alliance. The results are evident: tyranny in the State, matched by slavish submission on the part of the masses; ignorance so wide-spread that over eighty per cent. of the population was classed as illiterate; superstition rampant; and evil shameless.

These great historic ecclesiasticisms have become discredited with the monarchistic systems that sustained them. It is no mere coincidence that in days of enlarging freedom and vigorous aspirations for self-government the Baptist message should find acceptance, and that acceptance should be rapid where it has the advantage of multitudes of enthusiastic voluntary propagandists. For consider what is involved in our position:

(a) The Baptist stands in principle for the separation of Church and State; he boasts of the work of Roger Williams and of the Virginia Baptists who recorded the principle of religious liberty in the Constitution of the American Republic. The New Testament Christianity he presents can never be an instrument of political tyranny and reaction, or the New Testament Church a mere slave or echo of the State.

(b) The Baptist proclaims that the subjection of mind and conscience to a priesthood is entirely opposed to the teachings of the New Testament. The Book knows no priestly caste, and the message which uproots sacerdotal pretensions and tyranny brings a great deliverance.

(c) Moreover, the common man for whom the great historic churches have had no real message except a demand for submission, finds himself in the Baptist conception of the church wondrously uplifted. He is counted in the community as a brother and an equal; he learns that the true church of Christ is a spiritual democracy.

(d) Above all, the positive character and evangelic warmth of the message, the direct preaching of the Cross, and the constant appeal to the New Testament, explain the response.

It is no accident that Europe under present conditions finds hope and help in the Baptist message; it comes as the emancipating word for heart and conscience, mind and will,

There is in the story of continental Baptists very much for which to give God thanks, and the future is bright. What is needed from Baptists in other lands is the fellowship of prayer and of continuous brotherly interest. Central and Eastern Europe are poor; it is impossible for our fellow-Baptists from their own resources to set up seminaries to train their preachers, and printing presses to disseminate literature; in some instances they are even short of Bibles. Our strong communities can and should gladly meet these needs. For a few years it will also be necessary to assist the impoverished churches in maintaining their pastors; but the grants in aid of pastors should be reduced until they cease altogether as the economic position is restored. It would be disastrous if Baptists were represented in any land by permanently subsidized churches.

On the question of the form of assistance, the Continental Committee of the Baptist Union can be trusted to reach sound conclusions. This article aims merely at describing broad facts so that our constituency may gain a clear general impression of the progress of the work. Increasingly clear is it that no political arrangements will of themselves make a new world; statesmen may do their utmost, but the best of them recognize that without inward personal renewal, individual transformation, all else is vain. The spiritual task is of supreme importance. Our Christ leads in this; His shall be the victory and the Kingdom.

Jesus is worthy to receive  
Honour and power divine,  
And blessings more than we can give  
Be Lord, for ever Thine.

J. H. RUSHBROOKE.