

Baptist Union could also join the council, since it did not require mutual recognition of its members as churches of Christ. But when it was suggested unofficially that membership implied that no member church would do on its own what could be done by two or more churches together, the Baptists shrank back. Though the matter was discussed several times in the General Assembly no decision was made and the subject was dropped in the early seventies.

The story of the Dutch Baptists is a story of courageous witness, expansion, growth, emancipation and isolation.

JANNES REILING.

The Baptist Witness in Eastern Europe

IN his recent book *Turning East*, Baptist theologian Harvey Cox directed our eyes to the Eastern religions of Asia. Baptists throughout the world need "to turn East", not to Asia but to Eastern Europe, for it is there that we can again grasp our roots and the dynamic concept of the believers' church.

Two-thirds of the 1,177,362 Baptists in Europe live and work in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. If there is significant church growth among European Baptists it is to be found in Eastern Europe, particularly in Romania and the USSR. Baptists there as in Europe generally, are a minority movement, having suffered in the past from the large state churches, Lutheran, Reformed, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox. In order to understand the present situation, a consideration of the past church-state relationship is necessary.

The Old Situation

Before World War II and before the Socialist governments came to power, most of the countries in Eastern Europe had systems which tied church and state very closely to one another. In fact, sometimes church leaders were prime ministers! Because the churches were so closely aligned with the state there was usually a monopoly in religion. Thus Romanians were naturally considered to be Orthodox, Poles were Catholics, Germans were Lutherans, etc. This, of course, was and is true throughout Europe. For the Free Churches, and particularly for Baptists, it meant a singular lack of religious freedom. Baptists were persecuted in the nineteenth century in Hungary, for example, not only by the Catholics, but also by the Reformed and Lutherans. Or again, in 1935 the Baptist World Alliance had to protest to the Romanian

government because Baptists were being imprisoned for "proselytizing" (we would rather say "evangelizing") in an Orthodox country.

H. R. Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* speaks of five different ways in which the church throughout history has related to the state. These generalizations may help us to see how the churches acted before the new era began.

(i) *Christ against culture*: This was a somewhat sectarian view of Christianity which rejected the state and its culture and sought to live apart from it, judging it from the outside. The Baptists and Free Churches fit best into this category. They were rejected by society and in general rejected society and preached against its personal sins.

(ii) *Christ of culture*: In contrast to the previous type, the church might identify so much with culture that the heart of the Gospel was lost. It was a form of cultural Protestantism seen in nineteenth-century German Lutheranism's idea of "Thron und Altar". A good citizen was automatically a good Christian.

(iii) *Christ above culture*: Here the church dominated over the state, as often happened during the Middle Ages when the monarchies were ordained by the church. Catholicism and Orthodoxy played this role gladly. The state responded in kind by recognizing the dominant church as the official church. This was true in Bulgaria, Poland, USSR and Romania.

(iv) *Christ and culture in paradox*: Luther spoke of the "two kingdoms", Christ and Caesar. The Christian owes his allegiance to each in different ways and times. Thus the secular arm rules in society and the church concerns itself with "spiritual" things. With notable exceptions, this was generally the case with Lutheranism during World War II.

(v) *Christ transforming culture*: Calvin emphasized the role of the church to be leaven in society, transforming what is evil and supporting what is good. Thus the Reformed Churches worked with the state but advocated a certain prophetic criticism of the state. In Hungary and Czechoslovakia, however, they restrained their criticism and accepted the role of being a "favoured" church.

At different times, in different places, and in different situations, the church will act in various ways, as Niebuhr emphasized. One particular way is not *the* correct way, but perhaps one position will be more appropriate at one time than another. The above typology is helpful for an historical understanding of the relationship of church and state in Eastern Europe today. It also explains why the Baptists as a minority movement were looked down upon as sectarians. Their small numbers and their personal attack upon the cultural expressions of religion put them out of favour with the state and the majority churches. The typology also explains why when the socialist governments came to power the state churches were not very popular with the new rulers. Too much secular power had been given to the churches and the very structures of government seemed to award the churches these powers. It is not surprising that the Marxist govern-

ments quickly disestablished the churches and put them on an equal footing with all the smaller churches. Thus the great state churches and the small Free Churches were suddenly equal before the law and had come to a new understanding of one another and of their role in society.

The state churches generally looked upon their past with repentance and in some cases even asked Baptists for forgiveness. Bishop Bartha of the Hungarian Reformed Church spoke of this at the 125th anniversary of the Baptists of Hungary in 1975. In a moving address he concluded, "Only as we come closer to Christ can we come closer to one another". It is this view of ecumenism which today enables Baptists of Eastern Europe to move closer to their former tormentors and to seek among them brethren in Christ. This has not always been successful. There is still tension between Baptists and some other churches, particularly the Orthodox in Romania. But progress in Christian cooperation is a significant aspect of present-day Eastern European church thinking. This now leads us to consider the situation today.

The New Situation

With the disestablishment of the state churches, all the churches were forced to develop new methods of work. It is easy to generalize and thus often cover over differences and exceptions, but, in order to give in such a short space a view of how the present-day churches live and work in Eastern Europe, perhaps the following broad categories will help to give a sense of perspective.

(i) *Accommodation*: Among other definitions, accommodation means "adaptation, adjustment, convenience". The Orthodox Church which is the majority church in Bulgaria, Romania, and the USSR, had a very privileged position under the monarchies. It was in fact very dependent upon the state. The new situation has forced Orthodoxy to adapt and arrange a *modus operandi* with the state, wherein it does not attack the state and the state grants it privileges which enable it to carry on its work. There are few prophetic critiques of society, except as they pertain to situations in non-socialist countries. Involvement in the Christian Peace Conference (CPC) is the main Orthodox outlet for political statements. Accommodation has enabled Orthodoxy to flourish among 40 million adherents in the USSR, 14 million in Romania, and 8 million in Bulgaria.

(ii) *Confrontation*: Roman Catholicism throughout history has come "face to face" with various forms of government. Conscious of their strong central authority in Rome, Catholics often claim a more privileged status and more freedom. This is the case in Poland, where the Primate, backed by 30 million members, persistently confronts the government with new demands, whether relating to publishing, education, or travel.

(iii) *Cooperation and Service*: Protestantism has cooperated with the socialist governments when possible and generally followed a theology of *diakonia*, i.e. service. In the German Democratic Republic the

Lutheran Church, which is the majority church, carries on a very great programme of hospitals, schools for the mentally retarded and other welfare services. The large Protestant minorities in Hungary and Czechoslovakia do not carry on as extensive a work in health care, but their theology of service includes active participation in the Christian Peace Conference and scholarly critiques of present-day society.

(iv) *Personal transformation*: Baptists in Eastern Europe have never been large enough in numbers to influence the structures of society or to have a prophetic thrust against the state. Furthermore, they are influenced more by the German Baptist quietist view towards social problems than by the more aggressive American and British Baptist view of the Kingdom of God or a "social Gospel". Baptists in Eastern Europe, however, have a prophetic influence on society in the transformed lives of individuals. The call for personal conversion is a very public expression of new life and hope.

Accommodation, confrontation, cooperation and service, a call for personal transformation—these generalizations should not be given too much weight, but they do illustrate the varying relationships of the Eastern European churches to society. Sometimes a combination of these is more characteristic of one church's attitude. For Baptists, however, the personalistic emphasis is the high point of both evangelism and social concern. But just as all of Eastern Europe is not a monolithic society, so all Baptists do not react alike. While Baptists in the German Democratic Republic would stress personal conversion, they would also be involved in supporting old people's homes and schools and hospitals for the mentally retarded. The Hungarian Baptists, in their theological treatises, would also emphasize the social transformation of society. The fact that the Polish Baptists are building a new home for old people is indicative of the desire to speak to both the personal and social dimensions.

The above should help us to place the Baptists in the religious spectrum of Eastern Europe. With this in mind, we can now concentrate more particularly on the Baptist witness in Eastern Europe.

The Baptist Contribution to the Understanding of the Church in Eastern Europe: A Model Community of Believers

Bishop Stephen Neill speaks of the church as a great treasure chest to which each of the denominations brings its particular jewels. The Baptists of Eastern Europe are a model for the Anabaptist understanding of the church as a community of believers, something which Professor Moltmann in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* has tried to recapture for Protestantism in general. Baptists throughout the world could well learn from Baptists in Eastern Europe what the "community of believers" means for today.

(i) *Personal witness*: J. G. Oncken, the founder of the German Baptists, who have influenced extensively the present-day Baptist movement in Eastern Europe, emphasized "Jeder Baptist—ein Missionar" ("Every Baptist—a missionary"). Personal witness is not a burden for each believer but a spontaneous joy that comes out of

fellowship with Christ. Is it any wonder that in some churches as many as 400 have been baptized in one year? This is not because of any great preaching, but is generally due to the daily life and witness of the average believer to the new life in Christ.

(ii) *Holiness*: Associated with personal witness is the life-style of holiness. Whereas puritanism and pietism in the West have fallen into disregard because they soon developed into a self-conceited and arrogant form of legalism, in Eastern Europe, the quest for "holy living" has not been rejected but striven for with renewed vigour. In fact, this holy living is very often the main attraction in Baptist evangelism.

(iii) *Believers' Baptism*: Baptism remains the dramatic and visible demonstration to a secular world that Christ lives and is Lord of life. It is not only government regulations which force the age of baptism to be higher than in the West, but also the very strong belief that baptism is *believers'* baptism, a deliberate and mature decision to break with the world and to commit one's whole future life to Christ and the Church. With this high view of baptism the consequences for the fellowship are thus profound.

(iv) *A Community of Concern*: Very often in modern technological society the individual feels isolated and alone. That is true in the East as well as in the West. The believers' church takes seriously the concept of fellowship and the community. If one member is sick, all the members are concerned and involved in bringing him to health. One's life is seen not in isolation, but as part of a larger fellowship. Thus each member's gift should be taken seriously and discovered by serving the community at large.

(v) *Priesthood of All Believers*: When Martin Luther emphasized this Reformation principle, he meant not only that we need no priest to come to God, but also that each Christian should be a priest to his neighbour. Although Baptists in Eastern Europe, as elsewhere, have a hierarchy in their churches (of president, general secretary, pastor, deacon, etc.), this does not interfere with the understanding that each believer should indeed be a pastor to his neighbour or friend, ministering in word and deed.

We should not romanticize about our Eastern brothers and sisters to such an extent that we fail to admit their shortcomings and failures. The model community of believers may not be achieved—but it is their ideal for which they strive.

Freedom

The first question often asked of one who travels to Eastern Europe is, "Do they have freedom?" This is, at first glance, a very simple question. Yet on further consideration it becomes more complicated. Very often behind the Western question is an arrogance and defence of one's own status quo and the understanding of political freedom, as observed in one's own country. Political freedom as understood in capitalist countries is different from that of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Again, every country has different opportunities and different restrictions.

There are Baptist theological seminaries in the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Each Baptist union has its own monthly newspaper or journal. Many are allowed to print five new books a year. For example, Billy Graham's *Born Again* has just been printed in Polish. Freedom of religion in the West includes a certain institutional freedom to have childcare centres, nurseries, orphanages, hospitals, private schools, Sunday Schools, publishing houses, colleges, etc. Such freedoms are greatly restricted in Eastern Europe. Yet freedom of worship, the assembling of the believers for worship and prayer and singing, is permitted in all countries. Problems have occurred in the USSR where the "initiative group" have refused to register their churches, have withdrawn from the national union, and thus have not been granted permission to have houses of worship. (Recently, however, even some "non-registered" Baptists have been allowed to register their church building in Kiev!). Generally speaking, Baptists are free to own their church buildings and to hold worship services during the week and on Sundays. Many of the Baptist Unions have youth camps, old people's homes, and centres for the mentally retarded.

The church has lived under many different systems of government from the earliest times of the Roman caesars to the days of communism and capitalism. The church must never align itself with one political system but realize that Christ is over every system. Thus we live in a creative and critical tension with the world and the systems under which we live, East or West. When St. Paul discusses freedom, he speaks of spiritual freedom: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Cor. 3:17). It is unfair to bombard our Eastern brothers and sisters with the question, "Do you have freedom?" The natural answer of a believer is, "Yes, because I have met the Liberator, Christ!" One pastor from Eastern Europe explained the question of freedom in this way: "The Church is like a river. Sometimes the river flows with banks and it is strong and deep. Sometimes it flows without banks and goes where it will, often broad and shallow. But, the important thing is, 'it flows!', 'it flows!.'" Who but God is to judge when the church is "deep and strong" or "broad and shallow"? From my observations, in spite of the restrictions, Baptists in Eastern Europe appear to be deep and strong!

Brief Notes About the Various Baptist Unions

Much more space would be needed to give detailed information on each union, but some brief notes might help acquaint one with the various Baptist unions.

(i) *Bulgaria*: The 650 Baptists of Bulgaria have been isolated from the Baptist world for many years, but recently new contacts have been made which we hope will allow Bulgarian representation at Brighton and other conferences. The Rev. I. Angeloff, General Secretary of the Baptist Union, is a capable leader. New pastors and students will be needed for this struggling but witnessing church in a nation of eight

million Orthodox. The churches are very active and full and a good youth work continues in spite of difficulties.

(ii) *Czechoslovakia*: The 4,200 Baptists of the CSSR have two groupings, the Slovaks with headquarters in Bratislava and the Czechs with headquarters in Prague, where the national union headquarters are also located. Three CSSR Baptist students study at the Czech Brethren seminary in the Comenius Faculty of Theology in Prague. It is difficult to evangelize in this secularized society with a nine million strong Catholic majority and a large Lutheran and Reformed minority. The General Secretary Stanislav Svec is respected throughout Europe as an able leader and a devoted spiritual man.

(iii) *German Democratic Republic*: At present there are fifteen students in the seminary at Buckow. The East German Baptists have an extensive system of Christian service, including their own home for mentally retarded children and adults. A retreat centre, the Martin-Luther-King-Haus, with a capacity for 180 is full all the year round. In the past year the Scandinavian Baptists and Eastern Europeans met here for a conference on "Ministry in the New Testament". The 23,000 strong church maintains close ties with the West German Baptists, but is a completely separate union with the Rev. Rolf Dammann as General Secretary, and the Rev. Herbert Moret as President.

(iv) *Hungary*: In 1977 Billy Graham came to Hungary at the invitation of the Baptists and the Free Church Council. This was Graham's first evangelistic service in the Warsaw Pact countries. More than 15,000 attended services at the Baptist youth camp at Tahi. The Hungarian Baptists are very ecumenical and are members of the World Council of Churches. Their seminary of twelve students has a full course of theological study, with visiting professors from the Reformed and Lutheran faculties. Brother Laczkovszki has been president for many years and Dr. Szakacs is now General Secretary. Hungarians excel in music, and the Baptist choir is no exception, having sung at many international Baptist meetings, including Zürich and Stockholm.

(v) *Poland*: 2,500 Baptists out of a Catholic population of 31 million is indeed a minority. Yet this union has chapels all over Poland and carries on an aggressive plan of evangelism, which even includes broadcasts over Trans World Radio. Billy Graham's recent visit (October 1978) was a great boost for evangelism in Poland. For the first time, Graham preached in four Catholic cathedrals. Many priests and pastors were encouraged to take evangelism more seriously. The election of Cardinal Woytila as the new pope was received with joy by Baptists, many of whom knew him in Krakow. The past years have seen new church buildings in Bialystok, Koszalin, and Krynica. At present construction is under way in Elbing and Danzig, as well as in Bialystok where the new home for the aged is being built. In addition to the Baptists' own seminary, their fifteen students attend the Ecumenical Theological Academy. At least seven of their pastors are graduates of Rüsclikon.

(vi) *Romania*: The 160,000 strong union of Romania is probably the fastest growing union in Europe. The phenomenal growth of almost 10,000 baptisms a year is due to many factors, the most important being the zeal and courage of the average believer in witnessing to his new life in Christ. This year only ten students were allowed to study at the seminary in Bucharest. The past years have seen a series of new buildings in Arad, Brasov, Cluj, Sibiu, Medias, and Dej. The new leadership of President Mara and General Secretary Barbeteti is confronted with a host of problems, mainly how to keep a dynamically growing church together, with so many divergent views and ideas of what the future path should be.

(vii) *Yugoslavia*: Dr. Josip Horak has been the President of Yugoslav Baptists since the 1950s. He also broadcasts from Trans World Radio. The seminary in Novi Sad continues to function with part-time students from the university, as well as extension students. A new scheme for "Theological Education by Extension" is being planned and should increase the ability of the churches and pastors to witness in the increasingly secular society of Yugoslavia. The many language and culture groups are a perennial problem for Yugoslavia, but the 3,500 Baptists are able to remain together by their common faith.

(viii) *USSR*: The 550,000 Baptists of the Soviet Union are the third largest group of Baptists in the world, next only to India and the USA. Organized into fifty regions, each with its own superintendent, the Baptists of the USSR span two continents with growing and lively churches from as far east as Vladivostock and as far west as Tallin, Estonia. The General Secretary Alexsei Bichkov and President A. Klimenko have no easy task in holding the many groups together. In addition to Baptists, the All Union Council of Evangelical-Christians Baptists (the official name of the "Russian Baptists") includes Mennonites, Pentecostals and Evangelical-Christians. The intensity of their worship services and their singing provide a good base for evangelism, with almost 10,000 baptisms a year. The dissident movement of the 1960s has largely abated, with many former congregations and pastors re-integrated into the national union. Most of those imprisoned during this period have been released. Strong youth movements, particularly in the Ukraine, indicate that the Baptists in the USSR have hope for their future. At present more than 100 lay preachers are involved in correspondence courses sent out from the headquarters in Moscow. It is hoped in the next few years to begin a Bible School in Moscow.

In II Corinthians 12:10 we read, "When I am weak, then I am strong". Baptists in Eastern Europe share with Baptists in Western Europe a minority status. Yet this weakness in the light of faith has become their strength, bringing many men and women to Christ, the power of God. Your brothers and sisters in Eastern Europe salute you in the name of Christ!

DENTON LOTZ.