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## THE BAPTISTS IN BULGARIA

One of the most difficult mission fields in Europe for Baptists, as for most other Protestants, has been Bulgaria. From its beginning, Bulgarian Baptist work has been largely indigenous, but its planting was rather haphazard. At first the work was dependent primarily upon emigrants from Russia and colporteurs of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), some of whom were also from Russia.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many other fields, Bulgarian Baptists never received sustained and significant financial support until after the First World War. As one Bulgarian Baptist pastor wrote years after the work first started, Bulgaria 'has long been the forgotten mission field' and a 'stepchild' of Baptist work.<sup>2</sup>

The first Protestants to work in Bulgaria were Methodists and Congregationalists, preceding Baptists by almost a quarter of a century. While Bulgaria was still under Turkish control, the Methodist Episcopal Church from America entered Bulgaria in 1857, taking an area north of the Balkan Mountains, encouraged by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, predominantly Congregationalist in composition, which took the field south of the mountains. In July 1858 the American Board established its first station for Bulgarians in Turkey at Adrianople. By 1862 it had planted three other stations in present-day Bulgaria. In addition, both the BFBS in northern Bulgaria and the American Bible Society (ABS) in southern Bulgaria assisted the Protestant cause through their distribution of Scripture. In 1868 the BFBS established its Bulgarian depot in Rustchuk (now Ruse) on the Danube River. For its part, the ABS co-operated with the American Board and the Bulgarian Evangelical Society, a home mission society formed in 1875 from the work of the American Board.<sup>3</sup>

Missionaries had to face the fact that Bulgarian nationality was inextricably tied to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and Bulgarians looked upon Protestantism as a foreign import. Above all, Bulgarians wanted independence from Turkish political control and Greek ecclesiastical domination. In addition, a number of Bulgarians were beginning to lose interest in any religion and were attracted to socialist ideas. Free thought influenced many teachers. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Methodists and Congregationalists found Bulgaria rocky ground. Methodist missionaries gave up their field in 1871, returned in 1873, left again in 1877 because of the Russo-Turkish war, and again returned in 1879. After almost three decades of work, the mission could report in 1886 only 65 full members, 24 probationers, and an average attendance of 151 at the Sunday worship services.<sup>4</sup> The mission of the American Board was more successful, but its success was also limited. In 1886 it reported only 553 members and 8 churches with an average attendance of 1,457.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. BAPTIST PLANTING (1880-1918)

Baptists in the West first became aware of the Bulgarian field with the publication in 1880 of an article, 'The Macedonian Cry Re-Echoed from Macedonia Itself', in the German Baptist paper, *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, and the *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission*.<sup>6</sup> The article carried a letter, dated 10 August 1880, from Grigor B. Duminkov from Kazanlik, located in the valley of the roses in Central Bulgaria, on behalf of a group of Congregationalists who for four years had accepted the principle of believer's baptism. They had secured no Baptist pastor, however, even though they had continually appealed to German Baptists who had communities in Ruse and in Tulcea and Cataloi (or Katalui), two settlements in the Dobruja, a territory between the Black Sea and the Danube River which in 1878 became part of Romania. The group in Kazanlik had been aroused to consider Baptist principles from the coming in 1875 of Mr Herboldt, a BFBS colporteur since 1872, who was a Baptist of German extraction. He had accepted an invitation of a Kazanlik native to visit even though the town was outside his territory south of the mountains.<sup>7</sup>

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The Baptists to whom the Kazanlik believers appealed had diverse origins. As early as 1867 the BFBS employed two Polish Baptists from Prussian Poland as colporteurs for northeastern Bulgaria - Mr Kutschewsky, who served as head of the depot in Ruse from 1868 to 1872, and his successor at the depot, Christian Krzossa, from 1872 to after the turn of the century. Although Kutschewsky had already left in 1872, Krzossa was in Ruse, a preaching station of the German Baptist congregation in Bucharest, Romania, when the appeals came.<sup>8</sup> The Baptists who lived in the Dobruja had come from Russia. In 1864-1865, because of persecution, a number of German-Russian Baptists from Neu Danzig in the Ukraine settled at the village of Cataloi, twelve miles from Tulcea, already a German colony. In 1869, on a visit to the area, J. G. Oncken founded a church here. From this German Baptist settlement, two men, Martin Heringer (1837-1901) and Jacob Klundt (1839-1921), who became colporteurs of the BFBS, were later important in the Baptist work in Bulgaria. Heringer served the BFBS for thirty years, from 1871 until his death, living first in Lom and then moving to Ruse. Klundt began his service with the BFBS in Skoplje in Macedonia in 1872 and in 1880 moved to Lom, retiring at the end of 1900.<sup>9</sup>

The failure of appeals of the Kazanlik Baptists was certainly not due to lack of sympathy or indifference on the part of the German Baptists. In fact, the latter had turned to August Liebig in Odessa, who in 1879 brought the appeal before the general conference of the German Baptist Union in Hamburg, and to H. Berneike, a leading German Baptist pastor in Königsberg, but without success. In desperation, the Bulgarian appeal was now published in the German Baptist press.

Unknown to the German Baptists or the Kazanlik believers, John (Ivan) G. Kargel (1849-1937), who had served the German Baptist congregation in St Petersburg from 1875 to 1880 and was at least partly of German parentage, decided in mid 1880, because of the Russian climate, to move to Bulgaria and settle in Ruse. While in St Petersburg, Kargel had become a friend of V. A. Pashkov, leader of an evangelical movement in that city, who now supported Kargel for mission work in Bulgaria. It is not known whether Kargel had heard about any of the appeals of the Kazanlik natives before moving to Bulgaria, but in any case he was already in Bulgaria when the last appeal was published. As an ordained Baptist minister on Bulgarian territory, he was in a prime position to help the company in Kazanlik. On 19 September Kargel immersed five candidates, three men and two women, in the Tundzha River. The group was small partly because of the strict questioning by Kargel and Heringer, who would not accept all candidates, and the countervailing influence of L. Bond, a Congregational minister, present at the time.<sup>10</sup>

Kargel felt he had come to Bulgaria at a most propitious time since the Bulgarians had in 1878 been freed from their Turkish yoke and it was before the penetration of what he considered the acids of unbelief from the West. Kargel, who decided to study Bulgarian, undertook a vigorous ministry, which included travel to sites outside Ruse, such as Bucharest. Ruse, the site of a BFBS depot, was the logical centre of his work because it provided access to other areas. Kargel quickly crossed ethnic barriers and reported on one occasion that he had baptized ten Bulgarians, two Jews and two Germans. In 1884 Kargel founded the Ruse congregation as an independent Baptist church with 28 members. Because of the cost and difficulty of visiting, Kazanlik was neglected and remained for many years without a settled pastor. The Ruse church regarded Kazanlik as one of its stations, but the Kazanlik believers considered themselves an independent congregation. Kargel's preaching and the Baptists' rebaptizing aroused much opposition from the Orthodox, which brought forth attacks on the Baptists in tracts and the newspapers, and even beatings and threats. Although the Congregationalists did not find the Baptists a serious threat, they nevertheless were still irritated by their intrusion and their views on believer's

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baptism and closed communion.<sup>11</sup>

Soon after the founding of the Ruse church, Kargel, in spite of the pleadings of his members to remain, returned to Russia, where he became a respected leader and theologian in the Pashkovite/Evangelical Christian movement, highly regarded by all evangelicals, including Baptists, in that country. Krzossa, although busy in the work of the BFBS, now assumed part-time leadership. Fortunately, in 1887 Vasil Khristov Marcheiff (or Vasil Christoff Martschoff) returned to the church to become pastor. He had served as a colporteur of the congregation while Kargel was pastor but left in 1883 to study for four years in the German Baptist Seminary in Hamburg, Germany. While Kargel was with the church, it had met in his home, but upon his departure it bought a small house, fitting in it a meeting hall which could squeeze in fifty to sixty persons, if necessary, for services, which were conducted either in Bulgarian or German. In 1888 the church reported thirty-two members, three preaching stations, and a Sunday School with fifteen pupils. By 1893 Pastor Marcheiff reported that the church had five stations and sixty-five members, all poor and scattered throughout the country. In 1898, under Pastor E. Herassimenko, in spite of the attempt of the city authorities to stop the church from building a chapel by requiring a structure of great expense with foundations a meter deep and a stone base and cornice, it nevertheless built an impressive chapel with a steeple. The effort, however, left the church with such a heavy debt that it appealed for funds from Baptists abroad, including both America and Russia.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile a Baptist centre was developing in the area of Lom, some miles to the west on the Danube River where Colporteur Klundt lived. This suffered a serious loss in 1895 when a gang of rioters destroyed its chapel, which seated a hundred, seized its money boxes, and scattered its Bibles, hymnals and other papers. The congregation, organized as Bulgaria's third church in 1896, dedicated a new chapel in June 1898.<sup>13</sup> Baptists also entered Sofia, the capital. In 1893 Pastor V. Marcheiff conducted the first baptism of Baptist believers there and reported a total of seven Baptists in the city. In January 1899 Basil Keusseff formed the Sofia Church, but the congregation did not do well until Spas Z. Raicheff (Raitscheff) arrived in 1905. In 1903 Peter Igoff began a fruitful ministry in Kerkovitsa in western Bulgaria.<sup>14</sup>

Pastors or evangelists continued to be multi-ethnic - either Bulgarian, Russian, German, or German-Russian. Bulgarians included, among those already mentioned, Marcheiff, Raicheff, Igoff, and Keusseff. Keusseff, who had studied at Cliff College in Sheffield, England, served as missionary from 1894 to 1899 with financial support from the American Baptist Missionary Union (AMBU).<sup>15</sup> Another Bulgarian who greatly strengthened the work was Peter Doycheff (1859-1913), who arrived in 1902 in Chirpan, in central Bulgaria, as a faith missionary. Doycheff, a former Congregational minister who had studied in the United States, was a salesman and inspector of harvesters and flour mills. After his return to the United States on a business trip in 1901, he had become a Baptist. In spite of great opposition, he established a congregation in 1903, which in time built its own chapel. He also greatly furthered the Baptist cause by baptizing three young men who entered the Baptist ministry - Basil Takhtadyieff, A. D. Vidoloff and D. Khristoff.<sup>16</sup>

Non-Bulgarian workers included E. Herassimenko, Karl Grabein and C. E. Petrick. Herassimenko, a native Russian who had studied at the German Baptist Seminary in Hamburg, served from 1889 to 1891 as missionary of the Romanian-Bulgarian Association, became the first pastor of the Tulcea Church in the Dobruja, and in 1895 began a pastorate at the Ruse church. Grabein, a German-Russian, came from Russia in 1911. Ordained in 1919, he served as a pastor and evangelist. C. E. Petrick (1858-1930), who was a German subject but had served as a missionary of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in Assam, arrived in 1914. During

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the First World War, he distributed literature among prisoners of war.<sup>17</sup>

From the very beginning the Bulgarian Baptist work had a multi-national character, but Baptists now began to work among nationalities not previously reached. In 1915 Raicheff baptized Romanians in the village of Mertvitsa, who in turn spread the work to the village of Gulantsi (Gulanzi) where they later built a chapel and formed an independent congregation, served for a number of years by Abraham Barba (1874-1928). Before the First World War, work began among the gypsies. Jacob Klundt of the Lom Church baptized the first gypsy convert, Peter Puncheff, and gathered a gypsy Baptist congregation, the first anywhere, in the village of Golintsi (Golinzi). A friend of Puncheff's had stolen a beautifully bound Bulgarian New Testament from his employer but, not able to read it, gave it to Puncheff. A group of gypsies began to listen to Puncheff reading aloud from it, and it was not long before a number of them began to attend the Lom Church. In 1906 it was reported that Germans and Hungarians were using the same chapel in Neupest, sometimes holding separate services in their respective languages or using both languages in the same service. Fedot P. Kostromin, a former Cossack, had been imprisoned in 1890 and exiled to the Caucasus; in 1904, exiled from the country, he moved to Tulcea, Romania, and subsequently settled in Burgas, a port on the Black Sea, where he ministered to Russian exiles until his return to Russia in 1908.<sup>18</sup>

The work was handicapped by the lack of both a strong indigenous local association or union and of sustained mission support from abroad. In October 1888 the Ruse Church with two other congregations in Romania formed a Romanian-Bulgarian Association. As an association of the Baptist Union of Germany and German-speaking, it operated primarily for the benefit of German Baptists in Romania and Bulgaria. Even though the Association, as well as the American-German Mission Committee in Hamburg, which received funds from the ABMU, were interested in evangelizing ethnic Bulgarians, Bulgarian Baptists were becoming increasingly alienated from the German Baptist leadership in Hamburg, feeling it acted more like a stepmother than a mother to them. The Ruse Church was dominated by Germans, but the Kazanlik Church (which never had joined the Association), the Lom Church, and the newly formed Sofia Church petitioned the ABMU for direct financial assistance in an attempt to bypass the Hamburg Committee, arguing that the Germans had sadly neglected them in support for pastors and chapel building, had failed to print Bulgarian literature, and had refused to accept Bulgarian students at the Hamburg Seminary. Relations were further strained when the Hamburg Committee refused to endorse further support for Keusseff, who had fallen out with Klundt after he failed to marry Klundt's daughter.<sup>19</sup>

Bulgarian Baptists failed to get a positive reply to their petition, but under the leadership of Doycheff they formed in 1908 a Bulgarian Baptist Union. Although from time to time Bulgarian Baptists had received financial assistance from Baptists in Germany, America, England and Russia, Doycheff wished for a better linkage with foreign Baptists. He suggested that the Baptist World Alliance send a supervisor for Baptist work in south-eastern Europe, with Bulgaria as the centre. He promoted his plan through correspondence and also by attending with his wife the Baptist World Alliance in Philadelphia in 1911. Although a British and an American Baptist inspected the field, nothing came of the proposal. After the Congress, Doycheff gained the support of the Baptist pastors in Ruse and Bucharest for a plan of expansion and better mission visitation and supervision of churches, but the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913 turned his attention elsewhere. He distributed Bibles and tracts to the soldiers and engaged in relief efforts. With his untimely death from a mastoid infection in June 1913, Bulgarian Baptists lost one of their leading pastors.<sup>20</sup>

Although there had been friction with Congregationalists and Methodists in the

early days, there were now fraternal relations with them. Two Baptists participated in a convention in November 1909, composed primarily of Methodists and Congregationalists, to draft a proposed law on Protestant rights. The government did not accept the proposal. In 1913 Baptists participated with Methodists and Congregationalists in a pan-evangelical Bulgarian congress, the first of its kind.<sup>21</sup>

In 1895 Bulgarian Baptists numbered 95; in 1911, 160; and in 1918, 261. Growth continued to be very slow, but it was steady. In northern Bulgaria, congregations existed in Ruse, Lom and Berkovitsa, while in southern Bulgaria there were congregations in Sofia, Kazanlik, Chirpan, Stara Zagora, and Kostenets in the foot of the Rhodope Mountains near Plovdiv. In addition, there were a number of preaching points or stations.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. PROMISING GROWTH (1918-1948)

From 1918 to 1939 Baptists almost tripled their number to reach 700 and continued to grow for almost another decade. A number of new churches were established, including that in Varna, where an independent church was established by Karl Grabein about 1929, which eventually became the largest Baptist congregation in the country. Bulgarian Baptists made these gains in spite of political and social disruption, which included the shift from monarchy to a Marxist republic and entry into the Second World War. From 1919 to 1939 the Bulgarian Baptist Union held annual congresses, which brought greater solidarity to the work. The Union conducted a literature mission and published its own periodical, *Evangelist*, which appeared monthly from 1920 to 1938, and continued in 1939 as *Khristiyanski priyatel* (Christian Friend). In 1926 it had 1,500 subscriptions. The work of the churches was also advanced through youth circles, women's groups, and Sunday schools. The young (in 1926) and the women formed their own unions.<sup>23</sup>

One of the greatest supports to the Bulgarian Baptists was the adoption soon after the First World War of Bulgaria as a field of labour by the General Missionary Society of the German Baptist General Conference of the USA (today the North American Baptist Conference). The London Conference of Baptists in July 1920, which allocated fields to various Baptist bodies, assigned Bulgaria to the Baptist Union of Germany and the German Baptists of the United States. Although the German Baptist Conference in the USA was a small body of only 30,000 members, it was now ready for vigorous mission extension under its dynamic general mission secretary, William Kuhn. The Society appointed as its first mission inspector C. E. Petrick, pastor of the Sofia church who had been exiled to Germany for two years from 1918 because of his German citizenship. In 1924 it appointed Carl Füllbrandt, a German-Russian, to serve as inspector for the Danubian Mission of the Conference, which included Bulgaria. From time to time from his headquarters in Vienna, Füllbrandt would visit Bulgaria, hold evangelistic services and conduct theological training sessions. Kuhn himself visited Bulgaria three times between the First and Second World Wars - in 1925, 1929 and 1938. The Bulgarian field was no longer an orphan.<sup>24</sup> The German Baptist Conference provided not only counsel and spiritual support but also funds which supported many of the Bulgarian pastors, in 1931 assisting fourteen of them. It also built chapels, including Berkovitsa (1921), Kostenets (1921), Sofia (1923), Golintsi (1930), Lom (1930), Kazanlik (1935), and Varna (1938), besides helping restore in 1926 the building at Chirpin which had been severely damaged by earthquake.<sup>25</sup>

In the post-war era, Baptists in Bulgaria continued their interest in ethnic minorities. In 1919 in Lom a Turkish Moslem was baptized, and for a short time from 1921 in the city of Plovdiv (Philippopolis) Gotfrid Pedersen, a Danish Baptist missionary, headed a mission to Moslems. The work among a minority group which,

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however, attracted the most interest was the mission activity among the gypsies at Golintsi near Lom. The gypsy Baptists organized an independent church in 1921, and the first gypsy convert, Peter Puncheff, was ordained in October 1923. Although he died in 1924, the work continued to thrive. The congregation had ninety members in 1934 and about a hundred in 1940. With the assistance of the General Missionary Society, a chapel was erected in 1930, the gypsies themselves contributing by manufacturing 32,000 bricks. At the time of its dedication a small hymnbook, produced by Mrs P. Minkoff, wife of the pastor of the Golintsi Church, and the Gospel of Matthew, published by the BFBS, a collaborative effort by Mrs Minkoff and Georgi Stefanoff, were available in Romany, the gypsy language. In the 1930s deaconesses from the deaconess home, 'Bethel', in Berlin began to serve the gypsy work, and the General Missionary Society, through a memorial gift, provided a mission house for them. The Society also helped to support a missionary among the gypsies in Sofia.<sup>26</sup>

Although Baptists still faced opposition from the national church, persecution was rare, except in the late 1920s when Baptists first established their work in Varna. Baptists became alarmed at the arrival in 1920 of Pentecostalism, brought, among others, by Ivan E. Voronaev, a former Baptist who in the following year went to Odessa, Russia, to begin a notable pentecostal work there. At their congress in 1921 in Lom, Baptists condemned the movement, which had gained one of their pastors and affected several of the churches, particularly in Stara Zagora where Baptists needed to start anew. In early 1923 Petrick reported that, after afflicting damage for two years, the Pentecostal cause had lost its influence and was shrinking. Thereafter Baptists no longer considered Pentecostalism a serious threat, but Pentecostalism regained its strength and by the late 1930s had become the leading free church in Bulgaria, with a membership which exceeded the combined memberships of the Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists, the nineteenth-century pioneers. The Baptist congress in 1921 was also concerned about the adherence of some of its members, including one of its pastors, to the Communist Party and strongly condemned membership by any Baptist in a party which supported atheism.<sup>27</sup>

In 1941, two years after the outbreak of the Second World War, Bulgaria was dragged into the war on the side of Germany. In September 1944 the Fatherland Front, with key positions held by Communists, seized power and Soviet soldiers entered the country, not leaving until the end of 1947. The Communists had not as yet full control, but by 1947 had consolidated their power and issued a new constitution at the end of the year. During this period, Baptists and other religious groups still enjoyed religious freedom and continued to experience growth. Bulgarian Baptists held their 27th congress in 1946, and in September 1947 reported that with their sixteen churches and eight stations they had gained three hundred new adherents during the previous two years. From September 1946 to June 1948, Vassil G. Angeloff (1909-1971), pastor of the Sofia Church and a former Congregationalist who had studied in the USA, issued with the help of an editorial committee a monthly paper for evangelism, *Dobri Vesti* (Good News), which, however, carried only spiritual material and nothing on Baptist work.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. THE WINTER OF WOE (1948-1989)

Although the new Bulgarian Dimitrov constitution of late 1947 guaranteed religious freedom, the Marxist régime was determined to limit religion as much as possible. Its 1949 Law on Religious Denominations placed the churches under the control of the Committee for Religious Affairs, which approved the registration of religious organisations, now required for legal existence, and the election and dismissal of religious leaders. The Committee regulated all foreign relations of religious bodies

and determined what could be published.<sup>29</sup> With the other denominations, Baptists now faced very difficult times. Although the German Conference in the USA (now called the North American Baptist General Conference) planned to resume its ties with Bulgaria, which the Second World War had broken, the régime allowed no communication with foreign co-religionists.<sup>30</sup> The Conference held title to five church properties and was not in a position even to transfer their titles to the Bulgarian Baptists.<sup>31</sup> Bulgarian Baptists were now not allowed to hold any congresses, except for one small conference in 1957. In 1948 the régime stopped the publication of *Dobri Vesti*, allowing no periodical at all nor the right to publish any books or hymnals, permitting only the printing of a religious calendar with Bible verses. It was illegal to sponsor Sunday schools, youth groups and women's organisations or to hold meetings in private homes. The authorities forbade foreign visitors to speak in a service, including the giving of greetings. As in other Marxist countries, the régime attempted to indoctrinate youth with a materialistic philosophy and discouraged them from attending church, and many young people left the church. Pastors were prohibited from baptizing anyone under eighteen. Active Christians faced the prospect of obtaining positions with reduced pay or the loss of a job, and many people began to fear to attend church at all.<sup>32</sup>

In an effort to intimidate and weaken the Protestant churches and isolate them from the West, the régime began in 1948 to imprison Protestant leaders, including Congregationalists, Methodists, Pentecostals and Baptists, staging a public show trial of fifteen of them in early 1949. Charged with espionage and engaging in the black market and other illegal activities, under severe psychological pressure and physical torture, all of them, except one Pentecostal, admitted guilt, and the court sentenced thirteen of them to varying terms of imprisonment. Five of the defendants were Baptists, including Nickola Michailoff, president of the Supreme Evangelical Council, Pastors Georgi Vasoff, Zakari Raicheff and Mitko Matteff, and Ivan Angeloff, a Baptist evangelist then living in Lom. Most Western observers regarded the charges as trumped up and the trial a miscarriage of justice. Two months later the government tried ten other Protestant leaders which this time included Christo Neitchev, pastor of the Varna Church, and an engineer, Milan Kostov, who was president of the Baptist Union. The régime also imprisoned in 1948 Ivan Igoff, a general evangelist who, although never admitting any guilt, was placed for eleven months in solitary confinement and finally sent to a camp.<sup>33</sup> With the release in 1956 of Ivan Angeloff and Nikola Michailoff, who had been given a life sentence, all Baptists in the trial of the fifteen were now free. The régime had released Igoff three years earlier. At least two of the pastors, in spite of their ordeal, again became active in the ministry. Igoff (d.1967) became pastor of the Varna Church and, shortly before his death, pastor of the Plovdiv Church. Angeloff (d.1987) served the Lom Church and concurrently for a time also the Sofia Church. Another prisoner, Raicheff, who had married a grand-daughter of Martin Heringer, went into retirement in Ruse. Except for Matteff, who became a tool of the authorities and was repudiated by his fellow evangelicals, all of the imprisoned Baptists remained true to their faith.<sup>34</sup>

With the trials, the secret police now put pressure on leaders in the Protestant churches to denounce the condemned pastors and disassociate themselves from them, and fear swept the churches. It was a particularly difficult time for the families of the condemned. With the serious loss of leadership, isolation, government pressures, and lack of literature and opportunity for theological training, it is not surprising that Baptist membership began to decline, with congregations disbanding in both towns and villages. One post-war report recorded Baptists as having 23 preaching centres with 980 members.<sup>35</sup> By the mid-1960s Baptists had declined to about 600 members

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in 13 congregations, which were very scattered, about half in northern Bulgaria and the other half in the south. One centre of strength was at Lom with a congregation of over ninety and two neighbouring village churches, one gypsy and the other gypsy and Bulgarian, with the former group predominating. Varna was the largest church with 110 members, but the Ruse Church had declined to only twenty members. In winter months, it used only a back room of its church for services; in 1974 the government confiscated its building. A Romanian congregation at Gulantsi, near Pleven, continued but was small. The Sofia Church with 55 members was, however, an active congregation with twice this number attending. Except for several congregations in the larger towns, most churches were very small. Only two churches, Sofia and Varna, were self-supporting. During the next twenty-five years Baptists continued to decline, claiming only nine churches at the end of this period. The régime did not forcibly close any down, but under the adverse conditions they simply atrophied.<sup>36</sup> In a couple of places the authorities forced Baptists to share their buildings. In 1960 in Varna, they required the Seventh-Day Adventists to meet in the Baptist church. In 1978 in Kazanlik the government required the Pentecostals, after losing their building to redevelopment, to meet in the Baptist church, which had only a small membership and a lay pastor who was not well. The sharing of the building in Kazanlik resulted in a merged Baptist-Pentecostal church with the Pentecostal pastor taking the leadership with his much larger congregation.<sup>37</sup>

Bulgarian Baptists were now almost entirely isolated from the world Baptist community. In 1911, 1923 and 1934 Bulgarian Baptists attended congresses of the Baptist World Alliance, but in this period only one of them could attend the congress in Tokyo (1970) and two of them that in Stockholm (1975). They were also unable to participate in the European Baptist Federation and only on rare occasions might general secretaries of the Federation visit, like Eric Rudén in the early 1960s and in 1978 Gerhard Claas, with Denton Lotz, representative of the American Baptist Churches of the USA for Eastern Europe, on behalf of the Baptist World Alliance, visiting churches in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna.<sup>38</sup> William Tolbert, president of both Liberia and the Baptist World Alliance, visited Varna in 1970 on a state visit, giving Baptists a boost there.<sup>39</sup> In 1989 a group of Bulgarian Baptists were able to attend the Budapest congress of the European Baptist Federation.

In spite of a discouraging situation, Bulgarian Baptists nevertheless survived, with the persecution and restrictions helping to produce a dedicated corps of believers. Although the Baptist Union could no longer meet in congresses, it kept a skeletal committee, which by 1967 had been reduced from six to three members, with president, treasurer and secretary. The last trained pastor, Ivan Angeloff, died in 1987, but lay preachers helped to carry the pastoral load. Before his death in 1971, Pastor Vassil G. Angeloff of the Sofia Church assisted his fellow pastors by sending them typed sermons. In addition, the churches had a faithful constituency of women who, composing two-thirds of the membership, provided much of the support. Moreover, the churches were able to retain some young people, some of whom were able to receive good educations. Although children were not allowed to attend services in the smaller places, they were able to attend in the larger city churches, such as Varna and Sofia. In place of a Sunday school, the former church held a general service during the week directed towards youth, though all might attend, while the latter church was able to conduct a Bible session for all persons either before or after the morning service. In time both the Varna and Sofia Churches had choirs in which youth participated. Young people also met secretly. When in the 1980s the régime imposed a state-appointed pastor on the Sofia Church in an attempt to subvert it, members began to meet in house circles and even considered going underground. From the West, some evangelical literature was smuggled into the

country, and Baptists and other evangelicals engaged in an illegal publishing enterprise which translated and produced over thirty books.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. THE SIGNS OF SPRING (1989-1991)

With changes in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev and in other areas of Eastern Europe, political change suddenly came to Bulgaria in November 1989, with the forced resignation of Todor Zhivkov, president of the country and first secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party. With the move to democracy and a pluralistic society, Baptists with other denominations suddenly had religious freedom. They could now organise Sunday Schools, youth groups, and women's organisations, preach without restriction and meet and travel freely. They appealed to the West for literature and hoped to get official recognition for the secret publishing efforts which they had conducted with other Evangelicals.

Among the Protestants, Pentecostals with around 13,500 members in two bodies, although having lost strength in the rural areas, were the largest body and had begun to dominate the others, especially the Methodists who were in a very weakened state.<sup>41</sup> The Seventh-Day Adventists, probably the second largest group, had maintained their membership comparatively well. Baptists, in spite of their small size, along with the Pentecostals and Adventists, now exhibited great vigour. With the populace much more open to evangelical preaching and the old fears gone, Baptists opened new work or revived former work, and baptisms greatly increased. The Varna Church began to build a new structure, an activity Baptists had not engaged in for five decades. By 1991 four Baptist young people had gone abroad for Biblical study, and a Bulgarian Baptist delegation attended the congress of the Baptist World Alliance in Seoul, Korea, in August 1990. The North American Baptist Conference, by appointing in 1990 a representative for Eastern Europe with headquarters in Vienna, again showed interest in its old Danubian fields, and Southern Baptists provided significant sums for chapels and other needs and appointed a couple, who arrived in 1991 to assist Baptist work in the country.

One prime example of the new vigour could be seen in the Sofia Church, which in October 1989, on the eve of the democratic changes, replaced its state-appointed pastor with Nikolai Nedelchev, son-in-law of Vassil G. Angeloff. He launched an aggressive evangelistic programme. The church sent one team to work among gypsies, which re-opened the Baptist church in Berkovitsa, while it sent another team to work among Moslems. Women of the church organised benevolent work and provided a witness in a local orphanage.<sup>42</sup>

With the new freedom, Baptists immediately elected in January 1990 new leaders for their Union, who filled their positions until the convening of a congress. In November of the same year, for the first time in many years, Bulgarian pastors met in conference with an attendance of thirty. In May 1991, in Sofia, Bulgarian Baptists held their 28th congress with 115 delegates, the first in 45 years, in which they elected Dr Teodor Angeloff, son of Ivan Angeloff, as president, Bozhidar Igoff, son of Ivan Igoff, as general secretary, and Lyuben Stankov as treasurer. The congress approved a full-time evangelist for the Union, Vasil Vasileff, who had already begun five congregations and planned to start more. The Union reported 26 congregations with 1,350 members, doubling its size in eighteen months with an immediate goal of 5,000. The goal was ambitious, but it showed that the Bulgarian Baptists, after many years of oppression, were on the move, feeling a great door of opportunity had finally opened. In the light of their history, it was truly a new day.<sup>43</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Very little has been written on Bulgarian Baptists. J. H. Rushbrooke in *The Baptist*

*Movement in the Continent of Europe*, 1915, pp.91-98, and in the revised 1923 edition,

## THE BAPTISTS IN BULGARIA

- pp.167-171, provided two accounts of Bulgarian Baptists, the earlier one containing a number of historical inaccuracies. Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of Baptist Missions*, Philadelphia 1927, pp.433-434, provides a very limited sketch, as does Rudolf Donat, *Das wachsende Werk*, Kassel 1960, pp.385-387. Bozhdidar Igoff, Baptist pastor in Varna, in his typed manuscript, '7 Feb. 1971 god. Den na Svetovniya baptistski suyuz' (7 Feb. 1971. Day of the Baptist World Alliance) provides some limited material. An appendix to Igoff's paper includes a copy of 'Predistoriyata na Evangeliskata baptistska tsurkva v Kazanlik, napisana i pomestena v protokolnata kniga tsurkvata pred purviya protokol, koito nosi data 7 Septembri 1880 godina' (The Prehistory of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Kazanlik, written and Inserted in the Minute Book of the Church Before the First Minutes, Which Bears the Date of Sept. 7. 1880), an extremely important document on Baptist beginnings (hereafter cited as 'Predistoriyata'). The archives at the North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, SD, has a copy of the manuscript with the appendix. The volume, *Protestantskite sektii v Bulgariya* (The Protestant Sects in Bulgaria), (Sofia: Partidat, 1972), although written from a Marxist viewpoint, contains helpful material on all Protestant groups in Bulgaria. The section on Baptists, pp.85-118, is particularly valuable for its use of historical material from *Evangelist*, the Bulgarian Baptist paper published between the First and Second World Wars. Much of the Bulgarian Baptist history must be gleaned from Baptist periodicals published in the West.
2. *Missions* 1923, June, pp.339-340.
  3. For a very helpful survey of Methodists in Bulgaria from 1857 to 1895, see Wade Crawford Barclay, *The Methodist Episcopal Church: Widening Horizons, 1845-95*, New York 1957, pp.1018-1040. For 1896 to 1959, see J. Tremayne Coplestone, *The Methodist Episcopal Church: Twentieth-Century Perspectives, 1896-1939*, New York 1973, pp.443-478, 998-999. For the mission of the American Board, see William W. Hall, Jr., *Puritans in the Balkans: The American Board Mission in Bulgaria, 1878-1918*, Sofia 1938, and the insightful study by Tatyana Nestorova, *American Missionaries among the Bulgarians (1858-1912)*, Boulder 1987. For a work on both Congregationalists and Methodists, see Paul B. Mojzes, *A History of the Congregational Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia* (Ph.D., Boston University, 1965). For the work of the Bible societies, see their annual reports.
  4. Barclay, *op.cit.*, p.1032.
  5. Nesterova, *op.cit.*, p.28.
  6. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 15 Sept. 1880, pp.142-143; *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission*, Oct. 1880, pp.1-2.
  7. For accounts of the appearance of Baptist views in Kazanlik see, 'Predistoriyata'; 'Bulgarei', in *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 15 Mar. 1881, pp.69-61; *American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU)*, *Correspondence*, Letter of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Kazanlik to the ABMU, c.1893 (hereafter *Kazanlik Letter*), pp.2-3; and *Protestantskite sektie v Bulgariya*, pp.92-3.
  8. William Kuhn, *Gottes Walten in unserer Missions-Geschichte*, Forest Park, IL, c.1931, p.70 (also in *Der Sendbote*, 25 Mar. 1931, p.11). *BFBS, Annual Report*, 1868, p.146; 1869, pp.147, 193; 1873, p.209.
  9. Elsbeth Rauschenberger, 'Zur Geschichte der Baptistengemeinde Katalui', *Jahrbuch der Dobrudscha-Deutschen*, 1972, pp.208-217. *BFBS, Annual Report*, 1872, pp.158, 163; 1873, p.201; 1881, pp.107-8; 1902, p.135.
  10. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 1881, 15 Mar., pp.59-61; 15 May, p.94; 1 June, p.104; 1884, 28 May, p.170. *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission*, Apr. 1881, pp.11-13. *Kazanlik Letter*, pp.4-5. *Rushbrooke, op.cit.*, 1923, pp.168-9.
  11. *Der Wahrheitszeuge* 15 Mar. 1881, p.60; 25 Aug. 1882, pp.160-1; 1883, 15 Mar., pp.65-6; 1 Apr., p.75; 15 Apr., p.85; 12 Apr. 1891, p.3. *Der Sendbote*, 12 Aug. 1891, p.3. *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Sept. 1898, pp.545-6. *Hall, op.cit.*, pp.95, 132. *ABMU, Correspondence*, Letter of Basil Keusseff to Philipp Bickel, 6/18 Sept. 1894. For English translation of some of the German material, see *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission*, Apr. 1883, pp.7-9; May 1883, pp.5-7; and *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Sept. 1901, pp.404-5.
  12. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 15 Jan. 1888, pp.16-17; 1 Mar. 1889, p.48; 21 Oct. 1893, p.319. *Quarterly Reporter of the German Baptist Mission* Apr. 1889, p.9. *German Baptist Union, Statistik*, 1888, pp.18-19. *Baptist (Odessa)*, 22 June 1911, p.208. *Der Sendbote*, 7 Mar. 1900, p.150. *Rushbrooke, op.cit.*, 1915, p.92.
  13. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 1 Apr. 1889, p.66; 30 May 1896, p.167. *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, June 1895, pp.156-8. *ABMU, Correspondence*, Letter of Basil Keusseff to ABMU, 15 Sept. 1898. For Jacob Klundt's career, see Charles T. Byford, *Peasants and Prophets*, 1912, 2nd edn., pp.49-54 (also in *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 3 Feb. 1911, supplement p.II); Bozhidar Igov, *op.cit.*, pp.9-11; and Donat, *op.cit.*, p.386.
  14. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 2 Sept. 1893, p.272. *ABMU, Correspondence*, Letter of Basil Keusseff to ABMU, 15 Mar. 1899. *German Baptist Union, Statistik*, 1910, p.34. *Rushbrooke, op.cit.*, 1923, pp.170-171.
  15. For material on Keusseff, see *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Apr. 1895, p.116; June 1895, pp.156-8; Sept. 1898, pp.545-6; and *ABMU, Correspondence*, Letters of Basil Keusseff, 1894-1899.
  16. For Peter Doycheff see *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 9 Dec. 1910, supplement p.III (also in J. N. Prestridge, *Modern Baptist Heroes and Martyrs*, Louisville 1911, pp.186-191); *Home and Foreign Fields*, May 1921, pp.7-8; and *Rushbrooke, op.cit.*, 1915, pp.94-5, and 1923, p.170.
  17. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 1 Aug. 1889, p.146; 18 July

- 1891, p.223; 12 Oct. 1919, p.167. *Pioneer Review*, Nov. 1915, pp.6-7. Kuhn, *op.cit.*, p.70. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, *Correspondence*, Letter of C. E. Petrick to Mr Butler, c.1919.
18. Alexs Popovici, *Istoria baptistilor din România*, Chicago 1980, pp.256-60. Rushbrooke, *op.cit.*, 1923, pp.169-70. *The Baptist* (Chicago) 26 Dec. 1925, pp.1446-7. Kuhn, *op.cit.*, pp.70-71. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 29 July 1934, pp.259-60. *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, July 1906, p.296. For Kostromin's life, see *Baptist* (Rostov-on-Don), Nov. 1908, pp.17-18; Feb. 1909, pp.22-3; Sept. 1909, p.21; Byford, *op.cit.*, pp.109-20; Prestridge, *op.cit.*, pp.203-17. For an interesting account of the gypsy and the stolen Bible, but whose details in respect of Yugoslavia may be incorrect, see Edward C. Catlos, 'Links in a Golden Chain', *Home Mission Digest* (American Baptist), 1935, pp.18-20.
19. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 15 May 1889, p.89; 1 Aug. 1899, p.146. ABMU, *Correspondence*, Petition of the Bulgarian Baptist Churches in Bulgaria, 1899; Letter of Basil Keusseff to C. H. Mabie, 31 Nov. 1898.
20. *Home and Foreign Fields*, May 1921, pp.7-8. Baptist World Alliance, Congress, 1911, pp.40, 177-8, 228-30.
21. Coplestone, *op.cit.*, IV, pp.466-8. *Missionary Review of the World*, Jan. 1914, p.158.
22. *Protestanta sekte v Bulgariya*, p.94. *Baptist* (Odessa), 22 June 1911, p.208. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 3 Mar. 1918, p.40.
23. *Protestantakite sekti v Bulgariya*, pp.97-8, 104, 107. *Der Sendbote*, 22 Jan. 1930, part II, p.3. *Der Wahrheitszeuge* 21 Nov. 1926, pp.375-6.
24. Rushbrooke, *op.cit.*, 1923, pp.199-206. *Der Sendbote*, 20 Apr. 1921, p.5 (also in *Der Wahrheitszeuge* 27 Mar. 1921, p.96); 14 Sept. 1938, pp.7-8. *Protestantakite sekti v Bulgariya*, pp.98-9. *Der Wahrheitszeuge* 17 Mar. 1927, pp.103-4; 10 July 1927, pp.227-8; 19 May 1929, p.159.
25. Kuhn, *op.cit.* pp.42, 73-4. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 12 Feb. 1922, pp.55-6; 24 Feb. 1924, p.63; 9 Nov. 1930, pp.359-60; 28 Dec. 1930, p.415. German Baptist General Conference, *Verhandlungen*, 1922, p.25. *Der Sendbote*, 3 Apr. 1935, pp.2-3; 14 Sept. 1938, p.7.
26. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 12 Oct. 1919, p.167; 27 Nov. 1921, pp.374-5; 12 Feb. 1922, pp.55-6; 9 Nov. 1930, pp.359-60; 26 July 1931, p.239; 29 July 1934, pp.259-60; 25 July 1937, p.240. Rushbrooke, *op.cit.*, 1923, pp.169-71. *The Baptist*, 26 Dec. 1925, pp.1446-7; 13 Dec. 1930, p.1550. Kuhn, *op.cit.* pp.70-72. German Baptist General Conference, *Verhandlungen*, 1940, p.41. *Der Sendbote*, 30 Sep.1931, p.8; 21 Oct. 1931, p.10; 21 Sep. 1938, pp.7-8.
27. Kuhn, *op.cit.*, p.73. *Der Wahrheitszeuge*, 27 Nov. 1921, pp.374-5; 12 Feb. 1922, pp.55-6; 11 Feb. 1923, p.47; 28 July 1929, p.239. Haralan Popoff, *I Was a Communist Prisoner* (Grand Rapids: Zonervan, 1966), pp.21,26.
28. North American Baptist General Conference, *Minutes* 1949, p.53. Copies of *Dobri Vest* are at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.
29. L. A. D. Dellin, ed., *Bulgaria*, New York 1957, pp.189-90. A portion of the material in this section comes from the personal observations and interviews of the author, recorded in diaries from his two trips to Bulgaria in 1962 and 1967. For the 1962 visit, see 'Baptists in Bulgaria', *Baptist Herald*, 14 Feb. 1963, pp.10-12, which also appeared abridged in German in *Der Sendbote*, 7 Mar. 1963, p.9.
30. North American Baptist General Conference, *Minutes* 1946, p.40; 1949, p.53.
31. Letter of R. Schilke to Albert W. Wardin, Jr., 31 December 1962.
32. See Baptist World Alliance Women's Department, *Together for the Whole World*, 1990, no.2, p.4, and *Baptist World*, Jan.-Mar. 1991, pp.8-9, for accounts by Bulgarian Baptists on difficulties Christians faced after 1948.
33. For an account by a Pentecostal pastor of his trial and experiences as a prisoner, see Haralan Popoff, *op.cit.* For references to Baptists in Popoff's book, comm-mendatory and condemnatory, see pp.98, 111, 117ff, 125ff, 132-3, 143, 271-2. Also see Ladin Popov with Phil Streeter, *The Fugitive*, Glendale, CA, 1981, pp.51-62; Mojzes, *op.cit.*, pp.613-54; and *Po proteza na evangelskite pastiri v Bulgariya*, typed mss., by a Bulgarian observer. For official Marxist view of the trial, see *The Trial of the Fifteen Protestant Pastors-Spies*, Sofia, 1949.
34. *Watchman-Examiner*, 24 Mar.1949, pp.275, 278; 8 Nov. 1956, p.954. *Crusader* April 1949, p.2.
35. *Protestantakite sekte v Bulgariya*, pp.106-7, gives these figures for around 1964, but from other data available to the author they record an earlier period.
36. Statistics of individual congregations gained from the author's trips to Bulgaria in 1962 and 1967.
37. For the Baptist-Pentecostal merger in Kazanlik, see *The Right to Believe*, 1980, no.1, p.2.
38. For an account of Bulgaria see Erik Rudén, *Baptismen i Europa*, Stockholm 1964, pp.156-62. For visits of Claas and Lotz, see *The American Baptist*, Oct. 1978, pp.21-2, 39, and *Baptist World Alliance, Friends*, May 1978.
39. *The American Baptist*, Oct.1978, p.39. *Baptist World*, Jan.-Mar.1991, p.9.
40. For illegal publishing and smuggling of literature, see *Baptist World*, Jan.-Mar.1991, pp.8-9; Carol Woodfin, 'Bulgarian Baptist Congregation Enjoys New Freedoms', *European Baptist Press Service*, 6 Aug. 1930, p.4; Linda Pelzer, 'Only By God's Grace', *North American Baptist Seminary, Impact*, Spring 1991, p.3; and Erwin Damson, 'Bulgaria - A Forgotten Country?', *Light in the East News*, Apr. 1991, p.16.
41. *The Right to Believe*, 1980, no.1, p.2. David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 1982, p.201.
42. Damson, *op.cit.*, p.15. Woodfin, *op.cit.*, p.4.
43. 'Bulgarian Baptists Elect New Leadership', *Keston News Service*, 22 Feb.1990, p.3. 'Bulgarian Baptists Ministers' Conference', *Keston News Service*, 20 Dec. 1990, p.13.

## SOCIETY NEWS

'Bulgarian Baptists Celebrate at First Congress in 40 Years', *Baptist Press*, 17 May 1991, pp.6-7.

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### BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUMMER SCHOOL

The Society held a Summer School at Regent's Park College, Oxford, 28-30 June 1991. Cost constraints had reduced the length by 24 hours compared with previous schools, but attendance was high (52) and the quality of the papers particularly good, from Ruth Clifford's on 'The Royal Commission of King Jesus: General Baptist expansion and growth, 1640-1660', to the continued story of M. E. Aubrey, longest serving General Secretary of the Baptist Union this century, researched with increasing enthusiasm and related with humour by our Vice-President, Morris West. When at the end of his appointed hour but only two-thirds through the material he had brought Dr West suggested he should stop, the meeting urged him to go on, although it meant a late night all round. The other speakers were Grant Gordon, dealing with Ryland's delayed response to the call to Bristol in 'Correspondence between John Ryland and John Newton (1791)'; Geoffrey Reynolds, reflecting on '75 years of the General Superintendency - What next?'; George Rawlyk, offering a Canadian perspective in 'Maritime Holiness Baptists reconsidered'; while Sue Mills spoke on 'Sources for the study of Baptist History', and later showed members around the Angus Library. There was no organized outing on the Saturday, since Oxford generally, and perhaps Blackwells in particular, offered plenty to interest those who could tear themselves away from the Angus collections.

A useful session on Sunday morning collected ideas from those present about the future activities of the Society, before the party joined the congregation at New Road Baptist Church in worship, led by the Society Secretary, Roger Hayden.

#### List of speakers

Ruth Clifford, MA, research student at Regent's Park College  
Dr Grant Gordon, Ontario Theological Seminary, Canada  
Revd Geoffrey Reynolds, Superintendent of the Southern Area  
Professor George Rawlyk, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
Susan J. Mills, MA, ALA, Librarian, Regent's Park College, Oxford  
Revd Dr W. M. S. West, JP, MA, DTheol, LLD, former principal of Bristol Baptist College  
Revd Roger Hayden, MA BD, Superintendent of the Western Area

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