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## ‘PIOUS WISHES’

### Baptists and wider renewal movements in nineteenth-century Europe

In the early nineteenth century there was what Leon McBeth sees as a strong resurgence of Pietism in Europe. Out of this ferment, he suggests, came a new emphasis in parts of Europe on Bible study, prayer, and personal conversion. Some of the emerging local groups and movements called for a voluntary church and forms of ministry that related primarily to persons rather than to institutions.<sup>1</sup> There has been considerable debate about the precise nature of the movement called Pietism. However, the main contours of the story of the spirituality that came to be described as pietistic can, as W.R. Ward argues in *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, be told by reference to the work of Philipp Spener and those within his circle. In 1675, while based at Strasbourg, Spener published an introduction to sermons by Johann Arndt, a Lutheran theologian whose emphasis was devotional. Spener then published his work separately. The full title was *Pia Desideria, or Heartfelt Desires for an Improvement of the True Evangelical Church Pleasing to God, with Some Christian Proposals to That End*.

This book became more popularly known as *Pious Wishes*, and Spener’s movement was named ‘Pietism’ by its opponents. Pietism came to be seen as embodying a rallying call to a more vital spirituality, by contrast with the rather lifeless state of much German Protestantism at the time. Spener reaffirmed the centrality of the Christian experience of the new birth and also wanted to renew the theology of the priesthood of all believers, with its outworking in the recovery of lay participation. In order to improve the level of spiritual instruction, Spener suggested ways in which to revitalize preaching, which had become largely polemical, and also proposed *collegia pietatis*, or class meetings, in which believers would meet to teach each other.<sup>2</sup> These cells also engaged in singing and in sharing Christian testimonies. Ward suggests that Pietism and religious revival were not identical, but he links Pietism with the revival of 1727 in the community in Germany called Herrnhut, which was associated with Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf.<sup>3</sup> From this revival came the Moravian Church and the beginnings of Protestant missionary activity that reached beyond Europe.

The influence of the pietistic spiritual tradition was of continuing importance in the early nineteenth century. Aspects of Moravian piety, especially an emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus that led to mission, were to be found within Protestant church life in central and northern Europe. By the nineteenth century the original concept of renewal within Lutheranism had been significantly remoulded. The way in which groups were gathering for Bible study and prayer shows, however, the continued influence of pietistic thinking. New thinking about believer’s baptism was also emerging in various places in Europe in the 1830s, and it was often a form of Pietism, given fresh impetus by local renewal movements in the

nineteenth century, that gave shape to aspects of emerging Baptist life in mainland Europe in the 1830s and beyond. Some small groups, usually through their study of the New Testament, came to baptistic convictions and were subsequently incorporated into the Baptist community. This article explores the significance of European renewal movements for Baptist origins.

#### BAPTISTS AND RENEWAL MOVEMENTS IN FRANCE<sup>4</sup>

Baptist groups in mainland Europe first emerged in France in the 1820s and early 1830s. The roots of Baptist life in France indicate the importance of existing Bible study groups in the fashioning of fresh thinking. This is the account of the first French Baptist cause, in northern France, given later by one French pastor, Robert Dubarry. It highlights the role of serious Bible study: 'In the village of Nomain, in 1810, a farmer found in a corner of his house a Bible, which had long remained hidden and unused. He read it eagerly and lent it to his neighbours, whom he afterwards gathered together. They built a little place of worship, and welcomed in 1819 the first Baptist visitor to that region. This was a young man of twenty-three, Henri Pyt, who was to become famous as one of the greatest among French evangelists.'<sup>5</sup> Another factor in the developments in Nomain was that in 1815, immediately after the battle of Waterloo, a British soldier, who was an evangelical Christian and who spoke French, met with the Nomain villagers and explained the meaning of the Bible more fully to them. It was at that stage that they built a small place for worship.<sup>6</sup>

Dubarry made it plain in his account that Henri Pyt was not a 'militant denominationalist', a point not always brought out in the later histories. Pyt and his wife Jeanne, who were both Swiss, had come into contact in Geneva in 1816-17 with the Independent and then Baptist leader from Scotland, Robert Haldane, and were baptized by him. Geneva was the scene of a revival movement which was not denominational in character but within which Baptist influences were felt. In 1818 Robert Haldane, together with his brother James,<sup>7</sup> organized the Continental Society, with the purpose of evangelising continental Europe, and the Pyts joined the society as workers in northern France. Although Kirkwood<sup>8</sup> does not highlight the significance of the sequence of events when the Pyts came to Nomain, he does indicate that the drive to look at believer's baptism came from the study of the Bible which the group in Nomain undertook. It was not, therefore, that Henri Pyt had a specifically Baptist agenda. Indeed he had deliberately not directed the group towards baptism, fearing a controversy with the French Reformed Church.<sup>9</sup> The group's members were, however, influenced in a Baptist direction by reading an article Pyt gave them on William Carey. In 1820, when Henri Pyt was away, his wife Jeanne explained baptism more fully to the group.

Leon McBeth gives a rather different slant on these developments, saying that Pyt preached in Nomain for over a year, 'winning many to Baptist convictions'. It is also recorded by McBeth that in 1820 Pyt baptized a number of converts secretly

for fear of persecution. Another account, which is more dramatic, suggests that a group of those who had been meeting with Jeanne Pyt in that year were later walking with Henri near a river and suddenly said: 'See here is water; what does hinder us to be baptized?'<sup>10</sup> Pyt felt forced to comply. Those who were baptized formed a small Baptist church, the first in France and probably the first on the continent of Europe since the days of John Smyth. The original Nomain group separated into two congregations, one of which became a Reformed church and the other Baptist. Although the Baptist congregation did not survive for long,<sup>11</sup> Joseph Thieffry, one of the members, later became the first ordained Baptist pastor in France, and another member, Jean Baptist Crétin, became a French Baptist pioneer. This first Baptist cause in Nomain provides an example of the part played by those - such as the Pyts - who had been affected by a wider revival movement.

Further Baptist growth in France was indebted to other movements. The Baptist Continental Society made a brief but significant contribution in the years 1832-36.<sup>12</sup> The 1832 annual report of the American Baptist Missionary Union spoke of the need for evangelism in France; as a result it was decided to send two people, Ira Chase from Newton Theological Institution, and Casimir Rostan, a brilliant Frenchman who had become a Baptist in America, to investigate 'the possibility and propriety of attempting to diffuse among that oppressed people the blessings of an enlightened Christianity'.<sup>13</sup> Casimir Rostan was a highly gifted Frenchman who came from sophisticated social circles. He was born into a wealthy merchant's family in 1774 and developed a love for science, archaeology, and foreign languages. At the same time he became deeply concerned about the poor living conditions of people he met during his travels. In 1799 he was made professor of botany and natural history in his native city of Marseilles and was nominated archivist of the city and elected to the Academy. His commitment to Christian faith and practice was clearly seen in a religious and philosophical paper which he edited at that time.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to these achievements and interests, Rostan was one of the founders of the Society of Christian Morals, a society seeking to apply the principles of Christianity to social relations. His wide-ranging thinking in these areas was nurtured outside Baptist life, but Baptists were to benefit from his experiences. In spite of his successes in the academic world, in the world of public affairs and in social welfare, Rostan, as the *American Baptist Missionary Magazine* put it, 'was troubled in the midst of his labors of charity by the thought that he was too little occupied about his salvation, too little devoted to his religious convictions'. In 1825, when he was sent to Havana, Cuba, as the chancellor of the general consulate of France, he took the opportunities that came his way to engage in Christian witness. In 1827, with his term of office in Cuba complete, he moved to the United States, and it was there that his developing convictions led him to become a Baptist. The Society of Christian Morals noted with some disdain that 'Mr. Rostan, being deeply imbued with the religious belief of one of the sects established in America, kept himself separated from the denominations recognized in France.'

Yet Rostan, when he returned in 1832 as a Baptist missionary to his own country, soon gained a hearing among some of the intellectual élite in French society. His widely-known humanitarian concerns meant that he quickly attracted people of all shades of religious opinion who almost invariably disagreed with his Baptist beliefs but did not doubt his piety and respected his outstanding abilities. Dubarry records that Rostan was able to hire part of the old and historic convent in Cluny and there talked to leading theological scholars.<sup>15</sup> Part of his plan was to establish an evangelical society among French Roman Catholics. In the summer of 1833 he gave public lectures in Paris for Henri Pyt, who was by then professor of Christianity at the Society of Civilization.<sup>16</sup> In these ways Rostan brought visibility to the virtually unknown Baptist movement. His life came to an untimely end through cholera (he was looking after those dying during an epidemic) only thirteen months after his appointment by the American Baptist Missionary Union. But Rostan's career indicates how Baptist work drew from existing spiritual networks.

#### THE SHAPING OF GERMAN BAPTIST LIFE

Although Baptist life took shape in France before it did in Germany, it was German Baptist activity that was to dominate much of continental European Baptist life in the nineteenth century. The shaping of the German Baptist churches, and also the promotion of pan-European Baptist mission through German-speaking communities – a story which cannot be covered in this article – owes an enormous amount to Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800-1884).<sup>17</sup> J.H. Rushbrooke refers to Oncken as the European Baptist 'pioneer'. Oncken had, by the time Rushbrooke was writing in the early twentieth century, long been known as the father of German Baptists. For Rushbrooke it was hardly an exaggeration to say that he was the father of the continental Baptists as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Yet Oncken himself was subject to important non-Baptist evangelical influences. Having been brought up in the Lutheran church in his native town of Varel, in Oldenburg, he came into contact with new spiritual emphases in Scotland at the age of thirteen. A Scottish merchant whom Oncken's father had known took the boy with him to Scotland to start him on his working life and to 'make a man of him'.<sup>19</sup>

Following his arrival at Leith, near Edinburgh, Oncken not only found stimulus in employment but also found himself deeply affected by the evangelical Presbyterian atmosphere he encountered. A Bible was given to him, which he began to read. Later he moved from Scotland to London, where he lodged with a family who attended an Independent chapel in Blackheath. Both the public worship and the private family devotions in which he participated made a profound impression on him during this period. It was at the Methodist chapel in Great Queen Street that Oncken heard a sermon on Romans chapter 8 verse 1, which brought him to complete surrender to Christ. This was a moment that Oncken saw as decisive: the creation within him of new spiritual life. He went home, he recorded, 'with an inexpressible blessing'.<sup>20</sup> Oncken immediately embraced the activist ethos that was

characteristic of evangelicalism and he began to give out evangelistic tracts. He also used much of his spare money - and money he saved by frugal eating - to buy Bibles, which he also gave away.

In 1823 Oncken was accepted by the Continental Society as a missionary to Germany. The introduction to the Society was made by two ministers who recognized Oncken's remarkable potential. The founders of the Society, as we have seen, were Robert and James Haldane. From 1823 until his death, Oncken's work was to be based in the city of Hamburg, and initially he became a member of the English Reformed Church there. The pastor, Thomas Matthews, encouraged Oncken to speak informally to some groups meeting in private homes. Oncken began work in the areas of the city near the harbour. His first sermons, which were of a more private kind, were in late 1823 and early 1824. In these early months he found he was speaking to only about a dozen people. In February 1824, however, it was reported that 280 people had attended one of Oncken's meetings, although apparently only 180 could be accommodated inside. This was a period of religious change in Germany, as people grappled with new philosophical thinking. The vigorous evangelistic approach developed by Oncken would be taken by him into Baptist life.

The preaching of the 'new English religion', as it was initially labelled in Hamburg, spread quickly through the city. The rush to get the tracts Oncken distributed was so great that on the appointed afternoons when they were made available five hundred people would come to receive them. Clearly this was a period of spiritual awakening. There was considerable opposition from the city authorities, but Oncken, nothing daunted, began to preach in the streets, in cafes, and wherever else he could find hearers. In 1825 he started a school for children, in co-operation with a Lutheran pastor. Oncken later wrote: 'During these first ten years of my activities, the Lord blessed the work, so that here [in Hamburg] up to 80 souls have been converted.' His reflection indicates how study of the Bible was affecting his thinking about baptism and the nature of the church. He continued: 'In a shoemaker's work shop in 1829, those whose hearts were separated from the state church, gathered themselves to study the holy writings, particularly the book of Acts which, alone, is the infallible church history. Here we soon recognized that the church of Christ can only be composed of converted persons who have made a confession of their faith in His death by being baptized.'<sup>21</sup>

Oncken sought advice from Baptists in Scotland and was encouraged to baptize himself, but rejected this as unbiblical.<sup>22</sup> There was to be a protracted delay before he was baptized. Finally, on 22 April 1834, Oncken and six others, including his wife Sarah, were baptized in the river Elbe by Professor Barnas Sears, of Hamilton College, Rhode Island, USA. On the following day Sears constituted the first German Baptist church, with Oncken as its pastor.<sup>23</sup> By 1865 the Hamburg Baptist church had grown to 719 members and the church had over sixty preaching centres or 'stations', mainly located where members of the church lived. The mission activity of the church included features with which Oncken had been familiar since

the 1820s, for example regular Sunday School classes, a widespread tract ministry, distribution of Bibles, youth groups and women's missionary societies. One of Oncken's best known statements, apparently made famous in the 1860s but evidently well-known long before that, was that 'we consider every member a missionary' (the motto *Jeder Baptist ein Missionar*).

This mission vision led to the commencement of other Baptist churches in Germany. In this task Oncken was assisted by J.W. Köbner, who was baptized by Oncken in 1836. From his own Jewish background, Köbner had a profound understanding of scripture and was able to teach with great clarity. He travelled with Oncken on wider ministry.<sup>24</sup> The second of Oncken's most significant colleagues was G.W. Lehmann. His father was a copper engraver whose business failed; young Lehmann was given a home by an uncle in the Netherlands. There he met Mennonites and was led to personal faith. When he returned to Berlin he met with a small group to study the Bible and pray. His commitment to Bible distribution brought him into correspondence with Oncken in Hamburg and they formed a close friendship.<sup>25</sup> Oncken's baptism in 1834 brought tensions to the relationship, but it also stimulated Lehmann to study the question of baptism. This was often how Baptist ideas spread. On 13 May 1836, Lehmann and his wife, along with four others, were baptized by Oncken in Rummelsburg Lake, outside Berlin. The next day they formed a Baptist church with Lehmann as pastor.<sup>26</sup> The background of wider spiritual fellowship had been crucial.

As well as gaining new converts, Oncken, Köbner and Lehmann drew into the Baptist fold in Germany and elsewhere people who were already convinced about believer's baptism. In Holland, for example, Oncken and Köbner had an influence on Baptist beginnings in the 1840s, yet the Baptist movement there was Dutch in its origins: 'The Dutch Baptist Movement is a plant of our own soil.'<sup>27</sup> In the summer of 1848, a year when there was considerable political ferment across Europe, Lehmann summoned representatives from Baptist churches in Prussia to meet in Berlin, where they formed an association, or 'corporation', a precursor to a larger Union structure in Germany. The wider German Union was, inevitably, formed in Hamburg. Fifty-six representatives met in 1849 and organized the Union of Associated Churches of Baptized Christians in Germany and Denmark. In the minutes of the organizing committee of the Union in 1849 is recorded Oncken's reason for the creation of the new body: 'Every apostolic Christian church must be a Mission Society, and they are from God's Word the correct mission societies...the mission work must be furthered through the joining together of more churches.'<sup>28</sup> By 1851 the number of churches in the Baptist Union had grown to forty-one. Evangelistic priorities, to which Oncken had been committed in his pre-Baptist period, had shaped a new denomination.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SCANDINAVIAN AND NORDIC REGION

In Denmark, the beginnings of Baptist life were even more intimately bound up with

indigenous movements within the country than was the case in France or Germany. Johannes Norgaard argues that in the eighteenth century there were many pietistic groups meetings in Denmark, often in rural settings, but that the nineteenth century saw a new movement, Romanticism, opening up the way for a fresh period of spiritual revival. Romanticism's stress on the imagination and its call for deeper experience was especially attractive, he suggests, to the higher classes and also to many clergy in Denmark. Although a number of creative Danish thinkers, such as Hans Christian Andersen, did not examine the Christian faith in depth, others had a profound impact on Denmark's religious life. The outstanding Lutheran minister, poet and historian, N.F.S. Grundtvig, and the philosopher, Sören Kierkegaard, who was a severe critic of the ecclesiastical establishment, were among Denmark's formative spiritual leaders in the early nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Hal Koch, in his biography of Grundtvig, argues that when Grundtvig committed himself to spiritual renewal it was with the belief that his earlier adherence to 'Romanticism's longings and dreams' was futile.<sup>30</sup> Yet Grundtvig had new longings and dreams - for Christ's living word to be known in Denmark.

It was to a large extent this Danish movement of religious renewal, rather than something imported from outside the country, that raised issues in the minds of some of its participants about infant baptism, although J.W. Köbner, himself Danish, was also to be influential. One of those studying the Bible to discover answers to questions about the church and the sacraments was Peder Christian Mönster, who belonged to a group meeting in Zealand from about 1830; he was to be decisive in the Baptist story.<sup>31</sup> Mönster, then in his thirties, was a skilled goldsmith and engraver. P.E. Ryding, in whose house the meetings in Copenhagen took place, was a cotton printer. Members of the group attended the Lutheran church, the Church of Our Saviour, Christianshavn, where N.F.S. Grundtvig attracted eager congregations. Although Grundtvig strongly opposed rationalism in the Lutheran Church and his hymns transformed Danish worship, his spirituality was seen by many evangelicals as churchly rather than biblicist. He stressed the creative, sacramental power of the word of God spoken, believing that this word - declared particularly as the Apostles' Creed was said in the service of infant baptism and as the words of institution were read at communion - was spiritually life-giving.<sup>32</sup>

This focus on God's word 'only at font and at table', as Grundtvig put it in one of his hymns, created debate amongst Ryding's study group. Mönster's thinking about baptism was provoked by a meeting he had with a woman who had been a godmother at an infant baptism and immediately afterwards made it clear that she had no belief in the basic tenets of Christianity. As a result he came to reject infant baptism. Not all the Bible study groups in Denmark were thinking along these lines, but the Copenhagen group was fertile ground for Baptist convictions. On a visit to Copenhagen Köbner, as J.H. Rushbrooke put it, clarified the ideas of the group about baptism. But Rushbrooke's chapter on Baptists in Denmark is somewhat misleading in suggesting - at least by its heading - that Danish Baptists were the

products of Köbner's work.<sup>33</sup> Rather, Köbner was the final link in the chain that bound these Danish believers to the wider Baptist European family. During 1839, some in the Copenhagen group decided to leave the Lutheran Church and that October Oncken and Köbner baptized eleven people. The first Baptist church in Scandinavia was then formed, with Mönster as its leader.<sup>34</sup> It was clearly a product of the religious ferment in early nineteenth-century Denmark.

There were similar stirrings in Sweden in the same period. Many Swedish people began to meet in small groups to study the Bible (members were called 'Readers'), sing hymns and even celebrate the Lord's Supper.<sup>35</sup> Magnus Lindvall describes how 'a latitudinarian Lutheranism had given rise to the emergence of a pietistic/revivalist movement' within Lutheranism, expressed in informal meetings called conventicles.<sup>36</sup> This stream of spirituality was reinforced by revivalist influences from America. Frederick Nilsson, who had been converted when in the USA and had returned to Sweden as a colporteur, was baptized in July 1847 by Johann Oncken in Hamburg. Subsequently, in Nilsson's own words, the Lord was 'pleased to commence a Church on New Testament principles' in Sweden.<sup>37</sup> Evangelicals such as Nilsson were convinced that as a result of taking the Bible seriously they had come to a correct view of baptism and of the church.<sup>38</sup> As the Swedish Baptist cause grew through baptisms in 1848-9, Nilsson wrote: 'We now have twenty-eight Baptists! Mind, twenty-eight *Baptist believers* in Sweden. Two years ago, as I and my wife were talking about Baptist principles, we said to one another: "Yes, it is right; if the Bible is true, the Baptist principles are the only Apostolic, the only true ones; but no one in Sweden will ever embrace them besides ourselves."<sup>39</sup>

In 1852 Nilsson baptized Anders Wiberg, who was to become the foremost Swedish Baptist leader. Wiberg's experience of evangelical conversion was directly linked to German Pietism, since it was a result of his reading of Johann Arndt, and in the 1840s he worked for renewal in the Lutheran Church. He became increasingly critical, however, of the idea of a state church and unhappy about his responsibility, as a Lutheran priest, to administer communion to all those within the parish. In 1849 Wiberg felt that his position was impossible and he asked to be relieved of his duties.<sup>40</sup> Soon Wiberg began to celebrate the Lord's Supper in private meetings. Over the next two years he defended the actions of a group in Hudiksvall that had separated from Lutheranism and in Stockholm he had increasing contact with Readers who were discussing the issue of believer's baptism. It was against this background that Wiberg visited Hamburg and began to study the arguments for and against infant baptism. Having become convinced that paedobaptism was not biblical, Wiberg created theological waves by publishing a book defending believer's baptism, the first such work in Swedish.<sup>41</sup>

Anders Wiberg became the pastor of the Baptist church in Stockholm in 1855, and in several ways, for example through his bi-weekly magazine, *Evangelisten*, he encouraged Baptist witness throughout Sweden, Norway and Finland. Among

Swedish-speaking Finns, preaching by Baptists and the writings of Wiberg had an effect on several people who had already experienced spiritual renewal. The fresh spiritual energy of this period was associated with what Finns called 'the later Pietistic Movement', which gathered strength in the early nineteenth century and which, as Alfons Sundqvist put it, 'like a spring-flood overflowed the country'.<sup>42</sup> Karl Justus Mattias Möllersvärd, a Swedish preacher with a commitment to revival, conducted a mission on Aland in 1854. A Lutheran pastor on Aland had written to friends of his in Sweden asking if an evangelist could be sent to the area and it was Möllersvärd who arrived. A revival soon began on the island of Föglö. After five weeks of preaching, opposition became too strong and the mission came to an end, but groups affected by the revival continued to meet. They were still Lutherans and had not studied questions of baptism and the nature of the church. In the mid-1850s booklets by Anders Wiberg brought a number of Finns to Baptist beliefs.

In the same period a Norwegian Lutheran pastor, well-known as a preacher of penitence, G.A. Lammers, who had been affected by the spirituality of the Moravians, was impressed by the case for believer's baptism and came to baptistic convictions. In 1855 he and several others in the town of Skien formed the Free Apostolic Christians Church. Several groups associated with the Moravians and with a popular movement led by a farmer, Hans Nilson Hauge, were involved in collective Bible study in Norway in this period. A number of 'Lammers' churches were formed, but there were tensions over Lammers' attitude to infant baptism. Although he taught that new converts should be immersed upon profession of faith, Lammers did not consider that those who had previously been baptized as infants needed to be baptized again. Despite his personal authority, several of his followers came to a different conclusion. Some of those close to Lammers were baptized. One went to Hamburg and was baptized by Oncken. This led to stronger links with Oncken and the German Baptists, and, inevitably, much more definite Baptist views became evident in Norway. Lammers himself was unhappy about this development and decided to return to the Lutheran Church in 1860.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, his career indicates the effect of an existing renewal movement on Baptist origins.

#### FORCES AFFECTING BAPTISTS IN RUSSIA

Eastern as well as Western Europe had indigenous spiritual movements that provided the seedbeds for Baptist life and growth. The first explicitly Baptist witness in Russia was among non-Slavs, with Oncken playing a part through visiting St Petersburg in the early 1860s. But soon Russians began to encounter Baptist witness. A number of factors helped prepare the way for later Baptist growth in Russia. These included the Russian Bible Society, visiting English preachers such as Lord Radstock, the Molokans, and the Stundists.<sup>44</sup> Home Bible study groups were operating in the first half of the nineteenth century, and there was an increasing emphasis on personal conversion. Although it is sometimes thought that the story of evangelical and pietistic groups is one that has largely to do with people of little

influence in society, this was not the case in the early nineteenth century in Russia. Alexander Golitsyn, one of the Tsar's leading ministers, was at the forefront of a significant renewal movement. Walter Sawatsky writes of the impact of dynamic Lutheran pietist preachers who came from South Germany to Russia: 'Russian high society met in each other's salons for Bible study and prayer, some even experiencing ecstasies.'<sup>45</sup>

A branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Russian Bible Society, was formed in Russia in 1813, by some of those affected by this new pietistic movement. Alexander Golitsyn became president and the work of the Society was supported by Tsar Alexander I. By 1819 the complete New Testament had been translated into modern Russian and the society was operating on a large scale, giving out portions of the Bible in Russian in response to enormous demand. For a time the Russian Orthodox Church was involved. The work of the Bible Society was brought to a halt in 1826, however, when a reaction by the Orthodox Church set in – in part a reaction to mystical tendencies among some Bible Society leaders. The death of Alexander I in 1825 had left the Society vulnerable. But the work of Bible translation and distribution could not be entirely suppressed. From 1831 the Bible Society was re-opened to serve the non-Russian people within the Russian Empire. In its remarkable early years, the Russian Bible Society played a vital role in enabling fresh biblical thinking to take place and it can thus be seen as laying a foundation for Baptist beginnings.<sup>46</sup>

Others took up the work of Bible teaching. 'In the year 1865', J.H. Rushbrooke wrote, 'a twelve-year-old boy, belonging to an aristocratic family, was lying fatally ill in Petrograd [St Petersburg]. He had become a Christian under the influence of a tutor, but had tried in vain to win his very worldly mother. The boy's last testimony and appeal, however, left a deep impression, and she became a seeker after Christ. This lady (Mrs E.S. Tchertkova), having found no preaching in Petrograd that answered her need, undertook a journey abroad, in the course of which she heard Lord Radstock preach. She invited him to visit the Russian capital, and this he did in 1870, and on two occasions in later years, preaching in the houses of leading families with extraordinary effect. Count Bobrinsky, at one time a Minister of State, became a convert, and others included Count M.M. Korff and Colonel Pashkoff. These began to tell the Gospel story to their work people and the peasants on their estates, to print and distribute tracts, and to organize Christian philanthropic efforts. Slowly at Petrograd and elsewhere churches came into existence.'<sup>47</sup>

An account of the spread of this evangelical movement is found in a thesis by Paul Steeves, published in 1976.<sup>48</sup> Steeves suggests that the Brethren movement in England, with which Lord Radstock was associated, held to a doctrinal system 'almost identical to that of the Baptists'. This is not the case, since the Brethren emphasized a form of church life in which there was no ordained leadership. However, many leaders of Russian Baptist congregations were probably influenced

by Brethren ideas, for example in their adoption of an unambiguously premillennial position.<sup>49</sup> Steeves points out that central to the drawing together of Baptists and other evangelicals in the 1880s was the support of a number of aristocrats who had been converted, with Colonel Pashkoff (or Pashkov) the most prominent.<sup>50</sup> Indeed the movement around these people was sometimes called Pashkovism, although those within it referred to themselves as Evangelical Christians. A mansion owned by Pashkov on the Neva in St Petersburg – he had several estates and owned a number of mines – became a meeting place. Dostoevsky attended one of Radstock's meetings. He found Radstock ignorant of Orthodoxy, and in *The Diary of a Writer* deplored similar ignorance which he found to be widespread in Russia.<sup>51</sup> However, the situation was ripe for a new movement of evangelical belief as represented by the Evangelical Christians and by Baptist congregations.<sup>52</sup>

The Molokans, who were found mainly in the Caucasus, were also important for Baptist advance. These 'milk-drinkers' (a name which may come from refusal to observe the Orthodox fasts or possibly from their desire for the 'pure milk' of the Word) constituted a reform movement that emphasized the authority of scripture, sought to recover the practices of the early church and held apocalyptic views. They differed from Baptists primarily in that they rejected water baptism – in part probably because of their wariness about Orthodox sacramentalism – and thought instead of a 'spiritual' baptism, but many came to accept Baptist views.<sup>53</sup> One night in August 1867, Martin Kalweit, a German Baptist who had settled in Georgia, baptized a Russian merchant who was a Molokan, Nikita Voronin, in a mill creek on the Kura River in the Caucasus of southern Russia.<sup>54</sup> Kalweit had himself been baptized by a Prussian Baptist. Voronin was studying the question of baptism for himself and became convinced that what he heard from Kalweit about the baptism of believers was correct. The baptism of Voronin was one of the first known Baptist immersions in Tsarist Russia and is celebrated by Russian Baptists.<sup>55</sup> Prior spiritual influences, it is clear, had been at work.

The Stundist movement also fed into the development of Baptist life in Russia. The Stundists were concentrated primarily in the Ukraine. Their origins lay in German Mennonite and Lutheran groups which held weekly hours (*Stunde*) of Bible study and also of testimony. In 1867 an Odessa newspaper spoke with alarm of the growth of Stundism. Up to this point no Stundist had been baptized as a believer, but many of the Stundists were to come to Baptist views. In 1869 Johann Oncken travelled from Germany to visit some of the Stundist communities and during his visit he persuaded some key Mennonites of the rightness of baptism by immersion. The first Stundist to be baptized as a believer by immersion, Efim Tsymbal, was baptized in the same year by a Mennonite Brethren leader, Abraham Unger. It seems that Unger may not have been aware that he was baptizing a member of the Orthodox Church (an illegal act) since Tsymbal joined a line of Germans who were being baptized.<sup>56</sup> Several indigenous movements, as well as wider evangelical influences, together shaped later Russian Baptist life.

## FROM BOHEMIA TO THE BALKANS

Other religious traditions existed in Bohemia and Moravia, now the Czech Republic, and some of the areas within the former Yugoslavia. The most significant leader in the early Baptist period in Bohemia was Jindrich Novotný, who had a Roman Catholic background but experienced an evangelical conversion which led him to link up with the Czech Presbyterian Church and also with American Congregational missionaries in Prague. As a result of their encouragement, he studied in Basle for four years, from 1870 to 1874, and then received a scholarship which enabled him to study at the Free Church College in Edinburgh. In Edinburgh his professors included Robert Rainy and A.B. Davidson. On his return to Prague, Novotný became the first Czech to be ordained as a Congregational minister.<sup>57</sup> During this period, however, Novotný was questioning infant baptism. He was in touch with August Meereis, whose parents came from Bohemia and who had been baptized in Russian Poland in 1863. Meereis married Amalie Kejr, a Czech who had been baptized by Edward Millard of the Bible Society in Vienna. In the 1870s Meereis was working for the British and Foreign Bible Society in Bohemia and was encouraging a small group of Czech Baptists.<sup>58</sup>

August Meereis' wife, Amalie, had a cousin, Anna Kostomlatský, whose family had been part of the Herrnhut community in Germany (which had attracted many Czech exiles) but had moved back to their native Bohemia. Anna was a member of a Presbyterian church and became linked with the evangelical circle in Prague connected with the British and Foreign Bible Society. Through this she met and married Novotný. Within this family group, baptism was a persistent topic of conversation. Novotný himself came to definite baptistic convictions and was baptized in Poland in 1885. On returning to Bohemia, he formed a church near Prague with sixteen members. The church soon moved to Prague, where it was named the Prague Congregation of Christians Baptized in Faith. Baptist work flourished with help from the German Baptist Union, despite strong opposition from the Catholic leaders and government authorities. After ten years the Prague church had 180 members and its preaching stations gradually gave rise to further independent congregations.<sup>59</sup> Missionaries and colporteurs had already preached in parts of Bohemia, but it was Novotný, with his contacts within Czech life, who became an effective gatherer of existing evangelicals and new converts.

Baptists in Slovakia and also in the Balkans were indebted to wider evangelical links, especially through Heinrich Meyer, whose base was in Hungary. It was August Meereis, in 1888, who formed the first Baptist church in Slovakia, but Baptist outreach had been taking place at an earlier stage. Vaclav Broz, who was of Czech descent, was one who had meetings in his home. Meyer was also active in evangelistic work in the region and baptized eighteen people in 1882.<sup>60</sup> Like Meereis, Meyer was supported by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and is an example of someone who was prepared to use networks in various countries in central and south-eastern Europe to spread Baptist thinking. As John David Hopper

notes in his study of Baptists in the former Yugoslavia, Meyer was working in Zagreb in Croatia as early as 1872 as a Bible colporteur and began worship services in his home in Zagreb during the winter of that year. This venture did not last long, since there were some tensions between Meyer and the British and Foreign Bible Society representative, who was not a Baptist.<sup>61</sup> Meyer was no doubt attracting to his meetings evangelicals who were not Baptists and was advocating Baptist views.

From his new base in Pest in Hungary, to which he moved in 1873, Meyer made many connections with those involved in wider evangelistic work. There he met a Bible colporteur, Adolf Hempt from Novi Sad, who had been a member of the Church of the Nazarene, an American holiness denomination, but had been put out of that Church, apparently because of his readiness to work with Christians of other denominations. In 1875 he invited Meyer to visit and talk to a small group of Nazarenes in Novi Sad. A number of these Nazarenes, and also others - including Hempt himself - were baptized on 16 November 1875 and were drawn fully into Baptist life. Following his baptism, Hempt travelled as a colporteur in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>62</sup> In the late 1870s the Baptist congregation in Sarajevo, which had its roots in the 1860s, was meeting in his home. Franz Tabory, who had begun the Baptist witness in Sarajevo, was also from a Nazarene background.<sup>63</sup> Earlier holiness missionary activities were crucial to these Baptist beginnings.

A letter from Heinrich Meyer in 1875 gives the flavour of the first baptisms in Novi Sad, and shows how a mixture of religious factors was at work. He wrote: 'The Lord poured out his grace on us in November in Novi Sad on the Danube. A few Baptists there who had earlier belonged to the Nazarene Church had attempted to hold meetings, but not very seriously. Now the situation has changed. The older members were seized by sorrow and regret because of their former indecisiveness. Some had shown complete lack of concern and others had depended on their good works for salvation. They were revived. In a short time twenty persons received baptism.'<sup>64</sup> It is possible that the comment about 'good works' referred to the strong emphasis on the life of holiness in the Nazarene denomination. There may also, however, be a reference to 'good works' in the sense of dependence on membership of the Lutheran Church, since a number of the Nazarene members, and others who were baptized in this period and later, came originally from a Slovak and Lutheran background. Baptist witness benefited from existing expressions of religious life.

## CONCLUSION

The wider European religious scene in the nineteenth century is important in understanding continental European Baptist beginnings. There is evidence that Baptists, as they emerged in this period, took root in soil that had already been prepared. In various parts of Europe there was an interest in a deeper spirituality which owed its origins to the pietistic tradition. It was stimulated by such factors as nineteenth-century Romanticism and the freer atmosphere found in parts of mid-

century Europe. Across the continent the movements of renewal varied significantly, but in each case Baptists drew from existing spirituality. The example of France illustrates the way revival movements impinged on a local setting and led a group into Baptist life. Further Baptist developments in France were shaped by concern for needs in society and also had some links with Catholic spirituality. German Baptist witness, too, drew from existing religious ideas and evangelical networks, especially those associated with Bible Society groups. Scandinavian Baptists emerged as a result of prior movements of renewal within Lutheranism. In eastern and central European countries a variety of groups, such as the Molokans and Stundists in Russia, contributed to the forms of Baptist life that came into being. It is remarkable that despite their diverse backgrounds Baptists in Europe nevertheless formed a recognizable pan-European movement. The common factor was that groups of people in Europe were searching for a biblical expression of communal spiritual life. European Baptists in the nineteenth century were shaped by 'pious wishes' found in their own spiritual context.

NOTES

- 1 L. McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Life* (Nashville, Tenn., 1987), pp.466-7.
- 2 W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, 1992), p.57.
- 3 W.R. Ward, 'The Relations of Enlightenment and Religious Revival in Central Europe and in the English-Speaking World', in D. Baker, ed., *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia 2 (Oxford, 1979), pp.285-90.
- 4 For France, see Sébastien Fath, 'Resident Aliens? A sociology and history of Baptist implantation in France, 1810-1950: 'Another way of being a Christian in France', PhD dissertation, Sorbonne University, Paris, 1998. Fath draws attention to the brief but significant English Baptist contribution, 1832-36.
- 5 R. Dubarry, 'Baptist Work in France and Neighbouring French-Speaking Lands', in J.H. Rushbrooke, ed., *The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe* (1915), p.114.
- 6 A. de Chalandauc, 'The History of the Baptist Movement in the French-Speaking Countries of Europe', Northern Baptist Theological Seminary DTh (1960), p.34.
- 7 For background see D.W. Lovegrove, 'Unity and Separation: contrasting elements in the thought and practice of Robert and James Alexander Haldane', in K. Robbins, ed., *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia 7 (Oxford, 1990).
- 8 D.R. Kirkwood, ed., *European Baptists: A Magnificent Minority* (n.p. 1981), esp. p.14.
- 9 de Chalandauc, 'History of the Baptist Movement in the French-Speaking Countries of Europe', p.35.
- 10 'Baptist Churches in France', 'a correspondent', *BQ*, October 1951, Vol.14, p.183.
- 11 McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, p.484.
- 12 See Fath, op.cit., Tome 1, pp.146-54.
- 13 *The American Baptist Missionary Magazine* (Boston), Vol.12 (1832), p.329, cited in D.R. Kirkwood, op.cit., p.15.
- 14 *American Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Vol.14 (1834), p.329, cited in Kirkwood, *European Baptists*, p.16.
- 15 Dubarry, 'Baptist Work in France', p.115.
- 16 R.G. Torbet, *Venture of Faith* (Philadelphia, 1955), p.85.
- 17 The most recent book on Oncken is G. Balders, *Theurer Bruder Oncken* (Oncken Verlag Wuppertal und Kassel, 1984).
- 18 J.H. Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe* (1923) [A new book which incorporated material from the 1915 volume of the same title which Rushbrooke had edited, see note 4], p.76.
- 19 Oncken's father had fled to England after being involved in an attempt to overthrow the Napoleonic regime. He died in England.
- 20 H. Luckey, *Gerhard Oncken und die Anfang des Deutschen Baptismus* (Kassel: J.G. Oncken Verlag), p.42, cited by W.L. Wagner, *New*

- Move Forward in Europe* (South Pasadena, Calif., 1978), p.5.
- 21 H-B. Motel, *Glieder an Einem Leib, Die Freikirchen in Selbstdarstellungen* (Konstanz: Christliche Verlagsanstalt, 1975), p.100, cited by Wagner, *New Move Forward*, p.6.
  - 22 J.H. Cooke, *Johann Gerhard Oncken* (1908), p.57.
  - 23 Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement* (1923), p.76.
  - 24 I. Barnes, *Truth is Immortal: The Story of Baptists in Europe* (1955), p.24.
  - 25 F.W. Herrmann, 'The Movement in Germany: Its Progress and Consolidation', in Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement*, p.15.
  - 26 McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, p.473.
  - 27 J.A. Brandsma, 'Johannes Elias Feisser and the Rise of the Netherlands Baptists', *BQ*, Vol.16, No.1 (1955), pp.10-21; J. Reiling, 'Baptists in the Netherlands', *BQ*, Vol.28, No.2 (1979), pp.62-8.
  - 28 *Protokol Auszug Der Bundes Conferenz Gehalten Von Den Abgeordneten Der Vereinigten Gemeinden Getaufter* (Hamburg: J.G. Oncken Nachfolger, 1849), cited by Wagner, *New Move Forward*, pp.13-14.
  - 29 J. Norgaard, 'The Rise of the Baptist Churches in Denmark', in *Baptist Work in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden* (Stockholm, 1947), pp 12-13.
  - 30 H. Koch, *Grundtvig* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1952), p.98.
  - 31 For Mönster, see Bent Hylleberg, 'P.C. Mönster', Foltveds Forlag, Brande, 1978. For Mönster's contribution to religious liberty in Denmark, see N.B. Nielsen, 'Development of Religious Liberty in Denmark in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, with special reference to Baptists', Ruschlikon thesis (1964), and B. Hylleberg, 'P.C. Mönsters ansøgning om religionsfrihed 1840' (1999). See also E. Ruden, 'Baptist Witness in Scandinavia', *BQ*, Vol.28, No.2 (1979), pp.76-83.
  - 32 Norgaard, 'Baptist Churches in Denmark', pp.14-16; Koch, *Grundtvig*, pp.93-7.
  - 33 Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement* (1923), chapter 7. Torbet, *Venture of Faith*, p.87, gives the same impression.
  - 34 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
  - 35 *Ibid.*, pp.84-6.
  - 36 M. Lindvall, 'Anders Wiberg: Swedish Revivalist and Baptist Leader', *BQ*, Vol.32, No.4, p.173.
  - 37 T. Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York, 1887), p.831.
  - 38 Hj. Danielson, 'The Swedish Baptist Union', in *Baptist Work in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden*, p.63.
  - 39 Armitage, *History of the Baptists*, pp.831-2.
  - 40 *Diary*, 6/7, 1849, cited by Lindvall, 'Anders Wiberg', p.174.
  - 41 It was published in 1852. See Lindvall, 'Anders Wiberg', p.175.
  - 42 A. Sundqvist, 'The Baptist Movement in Finland', in *Baptist Work in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden*, p.28.
  - 43 A.T. Ohrn, 'Baptist work in Norway', in *Baptist Work in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden*, p.28. For Lammers, see Peder A. Eidberg, 'The People Called Baptists', DTheol dissertation, Oslo 1999, pp.20, 70-73.
  - 44 Albert Wardin has full bibliographic material on Baptists in the Russian Empire in *Evangelical Sectarians in the Russian Empire and the USSR: A Bibliographic Guide* (Metuchen, NJ, 1995). See also A.W. Wardin, *Baptists around the World* (Nashville, Tenn., 1995), pp.211-35; Pavel Belkov, 'Unity and Leadership in the Evangelical-Baptist Movement in Russia through the mid-1920s', BD treatise, IBTS Prague, 1998.
  - 45 W. Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont., 1982), p.31; Hans Brandenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty* (London and Oxford, 1976).
  - 46 J.C. Zacek, 'The Russian Bible Society and the Russian Orthodox Church', *Church History*, Vol.35 (1966), pp.411-37.
  - 47 Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement* (1923), pp.138-9.
  - 48 P.D. Steeves, 'The Russian Baptist Union, 1917-1935: Evangelical Awakening in Russia', University of Kansas PhD (1976).
  - 49 G.K. Parker, *Baptists in Europe: History and Confessions of Faith* (Nashville, Tenn., 1982), p.158.
  - 50 Steeves, 'The Russian Baptist Union', pp.20-1.
  - 51 F.M. Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer* (New York, 1949), Vol.I, pp.267-9.
  - 52 Steeves deals with the complicated relationship between the Evangelical Christians and the Baptist Union. This is not part of the present article.
  - 53 McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, p.491; A.I. Klabinov, *History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia*, trans. E. Dunn (Elmsford, NY, 1982).
  - 54 Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, pp.27-33.
  - 55 *Bratskii vestnik*, No 3 (1957), p.4, cited by

- Steeves, 'The Russian Baptist Union', p.3.
- 56 Steeves, 'The Russian Baptist Union', p.10.
- 57 J. Novotný, *The Baptist Romance in the Heart of Europe* (New York, 1939), pp.60-5.
- 58 Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement* (1915), pp.87-8. Appendix to chapter V, by C.T. Byford.
- 59 'Baptist Union in Czechoslovakia', in *Czech Ecumenical Fellowship* (Prague, 1981), p.77.
- 60 Wardin, *Baptists around the World*, pp.208-9.
- 61 J.D. Hopper, 'A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia, 1862-1962', Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary PhD (1977) p.12.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p.18.
- 63 Wardin, *Baptists around the World*, pp.208-9.
- 64 Hopper, 'A History of Baptists in Yugoslavia', p.18.

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**Basil S. Brown**, *A cloud of witnesses: Seventy memorable Baptists in Victoria*, Victorian Baptist Historical Society, PO Box 377, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122, Australia, 1999, 156pp.

The lives of sixty-three men and seven women who played a prominent part in Baptist life in Victoria are described briefly by a professor emeritus of Whitley College, Melbourne. Each article has at least one photograph and typically 500 words summarizing the life and service of the subject. Half the subjects were born in Australia and half came from the British Isles, some emigrating after ministerial training and experience in Britain. Most of the emigrants remained in Australia for life, though one, W.T. Whitley, stayed only ten years before returning to Britain - and founding the Baptist Historical Society. Forty-two of the seventy were missionaries, ministers or ministers' wives, but here too are dedicated lay church members, including lawyers, businessmen, carpenters, a distinguished metallurgist, the first professor of engineering at Melbourne University, and a pioneering plastic surgeon.

Historians will regret that what is evidently a thoroughly-researched ready reference to seventy leading Victorian Baptists has no indication of sources or direction to further information. A short chapter on the growth of the State of Victoria would also have been useful, to enable the reader to see the individual subjects in context. Nevertheless, this attractively produced volume will give inspiration to many and should provide sermon illustrations and subjects for short talks. Let us hope it also inspires others to pursue some of these 'witnesses' in more depth.

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