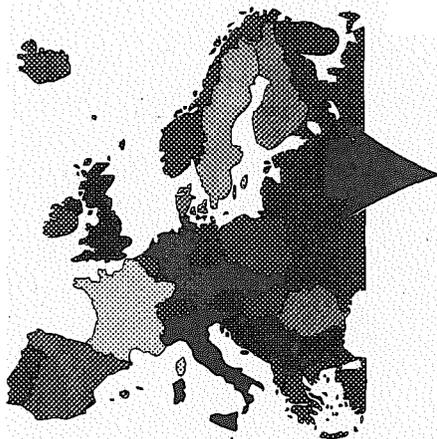


A WORD AND SPIRIT  
MAINSTREAM  
NETWORK

**Magazine Issue 57. September 1996**

**Issue Theme : THE NEW EUROPE**



**The New Europe** is all around us. We are in and part of it. This issue introduces some of the facts and implications for us all as we respond to the challenges of mission within and beyond Europe. In particular it explains something of how the East European Baptists have been faring since liberation. Carolyn Green, in a most effective BMS Presidential year, argues the case for BMS well and convincingly ... and blows away a few cobwebs in the process. Mike Nicholls writes on the theme of our 1997 Conference

with a particular case example in mind. John Wilson who trained with me at Regent's in the late 1970s - what a vintage generation that was!?! - writes from France with some thoughts about BMS that are both provocative and timely. Neil Brighton writes for us on the verge of beginning his training at Spurgeons this month. We wish him and all embarking on ministry and mission training well indeed. Please pray with us for the denominational consultation this month and **do** send us in your views on this after the event. We hope to feature developments and responses fully in our January 1997 issue.

Michael Bochenski. Editor.

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# Letter to the Churches

Dear Friends

The letter from your commissioning editor was quite a surprise. I recovered quickly enough and began composing in my imagination an erudite and profound epistle which would convert all to world mission in general and to BMS in particular. Perhaps the theologically unschooled are even more prone to flights of fancy than others! However, staring at the blank screen, I quickly realised that my experience of world mission has at no stage been theoretical, rather all practical. I remembered in time that to convince one should talk of what one knows. Someone will always argue with your theory, but it takes a bold individual to argue with experience.



In January of this year Steve and I had the joy of visiting Asia. It was part of my preparation to serve BMS as President - they felt I needed a wider experience! After all we had only been short term in Morocco and on a brief teaching assignment to Albania. Scattered through our time in Zaire had been visits to work in South Africa (pre-Mandela), Congo, Tanzania, Kenya and Senegal, not to mention six months in a Baptist church in Belgium. Perhaps it was a bit "Africa" orientated! India and Thailand, although classed together as Asia, are worlds apart in culture and Christian experience. It was a life changing visit for us both. At several points on our journeyings colleagues prayed for and with us. On the point of leaving Thailand, Geoff Bland prayed specifically for me. He prayed that God would not let me get bored with the message He had laid on my heart; that as I toured the UK during my Presidential year I would be able to share the vision that He had given me, and that I should be able to resist the temptation to vary the challenge to the churches.

It was as if God was confirming through Geoff the words I had read even before I returned from Zaire, when Steve and I knew that our time in Zaire was drawing to a close after 13 years. The words were from Ezekiel 3:

*"You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel - not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate". (vv 5-7 NIV).*

What a challenge when you think you are coming home to put your spiritual feet up after years "on the front line"!! Thinking about these words I realised that, for me, the call to return from cross-cultural mission ministry to counter-cultural mission ministry was as valid as *vice versa*. What's more, it promised to be tougher! The words which God speaks to Ezekiel are some comfort, for He says:

*"But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid or terrified by them". (vv 8-9 NIV)*

So what is the vision? What is the challenge? Is it something revolutionary? Something that has not been heard before? I do not believe it is new, but I believe we need to see God's vision anew, and hear the challenge to mission once more. Hear it in the language of our generation. You might call it a dream. In fact it was more like being shown an interactive video clip. I was in heaven. To my right a happy, excited group laughing, hugging each other, exchanging greetings. It looked like the happiest of family reunions, only the family members were of all nations and peoples. To one side there was a line of sober faced and, dare I say it, sober suited, observers. Yes! They were in heaven too, but they were disturbed by the rejoicing of which they had no part. They asked, "What's happening over there?" As one is able to do in dreams, I said: "Oh, they are the ones who were involved in world mission". How I longed for the joy of reunion to be part of the questioners' eternity too.

My vision for our Baptist fellowships, and I must restrict myself to the place where I can claim a right to voice that vision, is that each individual grasp the excitement of the message which brought them salvation. I long for them to be so full of it that they are compelled by the love of God to share the good News of salvation through Jesus Christ with anyone and everyone. I fail to understand the Christian who believes the message of life is for personal use only! Why, if you or I had the cure for AIDS or 100% sure vaccine against HIV in our fridge, if we knew how to make radioactive waste disappear and in even one of these scenarios we kept silent, we would be rightly culpable before humanity. But we say we have access into the presence of God Himself. We claim to know Him as Father. We say that this is available to all humankind, and yet we keep that news to ourselves! How dare we?

I was wondering aloud the other day if it would, in our litigious society, be a spur to evangelism if Christians could be sued by those who had died without hearing the message. Perhaps it would only produce a debate about predestination .. as successful a tactic as any to divert us from our mission task!

It is, I believe, the role of every Christian to be involved with God in His missionary task. From Genesis to Revelation we see God in action, coming

into the lives of men and women and bringing Himself where He could be found. Touching their lives in blessing, He entrusts them with passing on what they have known of Him. When he blesses Abraham it is so that all nations of the earth might be blessed (Genesis 22). When He blesses Israel it is so that all the nations might wonder at their God and long to share their destiny (Zechariah 8). When He blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1) it is that we may know the presence of His Spirit within and His enabling power to share the gospel. Paul, writing to the church in Rome, brings our responsibility right up to our front porch, onto our doorstep and, if we're honest, we can't dodge the fact that those who want to call on God cannot if we have not told them how (Romans 10). Put all this together with the command which we already have in front of us from Jesus Himself to go to the whole world with the Good News (Matthew 28). We would have to argue a pretty strong case to be let off the mission hook.

So the question which each member of our fellowship must ask of himself, or the question that fellowship must put to her is "*where in the world do You want me to be a missionary?*" There seems to be a great church-folk-wisdom which says that the overseas missionary is the brave one; the more godly one; the one who knew how to pray; the one who is winning souls to Christ; the one who was willing to leave everything that mattered in life to take the Gospel into the unknown. How far from the truth. Cross-cultural mission has all the excitement, all the buzz of surviving another day in a tough situation, but the Christian bit is no different from what you should be doing day by day anywhere: living the Gospel by word and deed; making Jesus known.

There is a danger in staying in your own culture. It is a risk that, rather than making a positive choice to be involved in mission at home, we see mission as something someone else does, somewhere else. We see our commitment to be only to the sort of mission activity which makes us feel good. The kind of missiology which enables us to feel comfortable at home, promising to pray, promising to give money. In reality we neither give nor pray nor go! The vision for me for our churches is that those who know the truth of the simple gospel tell those who do not know. As Christians we should look first at the world, where men and women are separated from God by sin, and a bit more than sin. If we can help remove any extra barrier (ignorance, poverty, illness) and also share that good news, then we will be some way to realising the vision.

If you examine your heart before God, find that He is asking you to stay in your own culture to do mission, you *still* need to support those who are in a cross-cultural situation. They cannot do it for themselves, and we are told that we should bear one another's burdens. Release someone to fulfil the vision which God, BMS and that brother or sister share. How do we as Baptists "do"

cross-cultural mission? I'd be lying if I said it must all be done through BMS. If every Baptist church in the UK was committed even 50% to overseas mission, BMS would be unable to cope with the support and logistics. We are as yet unable to say that we are able to facilitate mission work in every place that God has laid upon an individual's heart. Many constraints are laid upon us because the financial resources are not yet being released. I thank God there are other agencies with the same priorities ... "to reach the unreached with the Gospel in word and deed". But how I long for BMS to be the first port of call when a Baptist church is setting someone aside for cross-cultural missionary work.

Two years ago I spoke with around 10% of pastors in Baptist churches belonging to BUGB, BUS and BUW. It was tragic to hear many speak authoritatively but mistakenly about the objectives they believed BMS to hold. I was saddened to hear thoughtful people dismiss without understanding the role of a society which belongs to a whole denomination. As one person, in one year, I cannot undo the damage of years of prejudice. One person can, however, share the experience of working in a fellowship in Zaire renewed through the Spirit of God after the preaching of the word and prayer; a fellowship which had lost every material support and relies on the worldwide family to pray and give and give again to keep the Good News going round. I can only speak of what I have seen in the dedication of individual BMS workers giving until physically exhausted to love, support, feed and teach the children of Indian counter-cultural missionaries. I can only share the experience of praying with children in Albania, taught by missionaries that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, before the children went out to witness to their faith. I can only tell you of the teamwork between missionary and national Christian as Bible studies are prepared, and journeys undertaken so that the message can be explained in detail in the hill villages of Thailand. So that is a small part of the vision. What about the challenge?

In French, to issue a challenge is *lancer le défi*. There is the sense of pace and excitement in the word "throw". It is a challenge which is already in the air. Is there anyone there to catch it? What will happen if no-one picks it up? The challenge thrown to the churches is the picture of the man, woman or child who longs to call out to God. But they don't know Who to call out to! There are so many voices. So many calling to them. Who is right? Who loves to the uttermost? Who is faithful and just to forgive sin and cleanse from all unrighteousness? No-one else can offer salvation, but God alone; the God who says, "Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". (Joel 2). Now the challenge becomes a series of questions: "How can they call on Him of whom they have not heard?" Logical. "How can they hear if they are not told?" Exactly! "How can they be told if the teller of the news stays at home

and prays that someone else will go?"

Jesus puts the challenge to world mission right in our faces! He says, "Go into all the world"; not just to do good and show compassion, but to preach and teach and make disciples (Matthew 28). It still is as it ever was, the challenge ... no not just a challenge, more like a command ... to go tell, teach, baptise. It never has been "us" going to "them". The first history date I learnt at school was "563AD Columba came!" and Scotland heard on Whom to call. As the world church also hears the challenge do we not feel ashamed at the reality of the vision in our Korean, Zairian and Brazilian missionaries who are "going" where we will not go for the Gospel?

I'd rather have spoken to you than have written. I could have shared the enthusiasm more easily and you would have been able to catch the thrill of finding that the right place for us was in cross-cultural mission. Steve and I know the right place for us now is this tough culture, battling to speak for Jesus in a small fellowship in a needy community, in a language that is not difficult to understand. We are so glad we did our apprenticeship in Zaire! We believe we are better equipped than we were. Tougher still is encouraging others to think "World Christian". I do pray that you will open the eyes and hearts of your congregations to the great things God is doing through BMS. I ask you to listen to the ones who are doing it and I dare you to ask God if it could be for you too. I pray that you will be able to support the initiatives in cross-cultural mission by sending us your best people! and also by inviting our partners who have heard the challenge of men and women without Christ in this country, to work alongside you in mission.

Neither the vision nor the challenge are new then. Will you respond in a way that is new to you? Whatever you do, "pray ... that God may open a door for our message" (Colossians 4:3).

May the God of all Grace be with you.

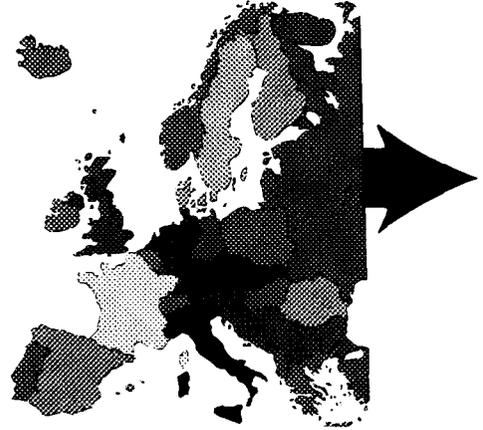
*Carolyn Green, President of The Baptist Missionary Society 1996-7 .*

*Editor's Note. We are happy to announce that Carolyn will be leading our world mission evening on the Tuesday of the 1997 Mainstream Conference.*

# THE NEW EUROPE (1)

## East European Baptist life in the 1990s.

In the article that follows, which for convenience I have divided into two, the recent life of Baptist communities in the Second World will be considered after some brief statistics and reminders of contemporary Second World political history. These analyses include ones of the several of the nation states that once formed the Soviet Union. Though technically 'Asiatic European' they formed together what we have called the Second World. The sources for the material in this article are threefold.



The European Baptist Press Service whose excellent media releases are the principal source for the material on East European Baptist life.

'The Economist' Pocket Europe (1994)

'The New Democracies in Eastern Europe' by Sten Berglund and Jan åke Dellenbrant (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited 1994).

The statistics of Baptist communities are those provided by the European Baptist Federation (EBF) for their 1994 Congress in Lillehammer, Norway. By their very nature, these details and statistics are constantly changing. The 1994 EBF Congress seems, then, a good central point of time at which to freeze this analysis at least for the purposes of this article, though some later references will be included.

### Albania

Communist Albania was a creation of Enver Hoxha who ruled it from 1945 until his death in 1985. The Hoxha regime practiced a particularly hardline brand of Communism which kept foreign trade to a bare minimum and banned foreign investment. After Hoxha's death, Ramiz Alia slowly attempted to undo the harm of those decades. Since elections in 1992 the country has been run by a coalition dominated by the Democratic Party under President Sali Berisha. The People's Assembly has 140 deputies, 100 directly elected and 40 appointed by proportional representation. Rapid economic and political reforms have resulted. These include the relaxing of the fiercest anti-religion policies anywhere in the world. In March 1993 new proposals suggested that all religions were to be 'separate but equal' before the law and that 'freedom of thought, conscience and religion' should be guaranteed. 1993 saw a Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) growth of some 8% due chiefly to foreign aid, especially from Italy and from hard currency brought into Albania by guest-workers in Greece. Agriculture is being privatised and natural resources such as copper and chromium offer the potential for a better future.

Several versions of the Bible in Albanian are now available, or are in preparation with the help of the Italian Bible Society. In particular, the C19th Krispofordhi version is being completely revised. The arrival of British Baptist Missionary workers Chris and Mairi Burnett marked the effective rebirth of Baptist witness, in Albania. Before them a Strict Baptist Mission the Albanian Evangelical Trust, it should be noted, had also been active in Albania. The Burnetts were based in Tirana where they planted, with the help of the EBF, the first Albanian Baptist Church. In September 1993 former US President Jimmy Carter visited this Baptist Centre in Albania, attracting considerable media attention in the process. The first service there was held on Saturday September 11th 1993 with the congregation of 70 or so spilling out into the Centre's garden. By 1994 the worshipping community was 90 or so strong with a number of smaller children and younger teenagers. Several baptisms took place that year.

In January 1994, Albanian Christians celebrated the centenary of the death of Albanian Evangelical Pioneer Gjerasim D Qiriazhi, founder of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance. An international Christian team from several nations, co-ordinated by the EBF, have been working all over Albania. At the Agricultural University of Tirana; at the Vlora medical project in southern Albania; at the Albanian Language School for Christian workers and at the consultative medical clinic in Tirana. In the Autumn of 1994 a small group of Baptists meeting in Puké in the North of the country was discovered! They had been led to faith in Christ and then baptised by Baptist missionaries from Sweden. One of their number serves as honorary pastor and guides the group in Friday night worship. Brazilian Baptist missionaries have also been active in Albania.

The population of Albania is 3.36 million, 35% of which is urban. Ethnic groups are Albanian (90%) and Greek (8%). The country is predominantly Muslim. Albania has a very small but growing Baptist community. The 1994 EBF statistics tell of only 2 churches and 25 members.

### **Bulgaria**

Todor Zhivkov led Bulgaria for much of the Communist era. In the 1980s he resisted strongly Gorbachev's reforms. Free elections were held in 1990 but were won by the former Communist Bulgarian Socialist Party, not least because the opposition was in disarray. The majority was slender, however, and in 1991 new elections secured coalition government by non-Communists. In the words of the Bulgarian dissident Panayot Denev: 'What happened on

13th October 1991? The Communists in Bulgaria were defeated at last<sup>(1)</sup> A former dissident philosopher Zhelyu Zhelev was elected President in that same year. Nationalism with an authoritarian flavour has characterised the Bulgarian government in the 1990s<sup>(2)</sup>. The desire for integration with the First World has, nonetheless, not diminished. Bulgaria has an association agreement with the EU and is keen to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Relations with Turkey and with Greece have improved. A diffidence about economic reforms has meant that Bulgaria has not advanced economically as rapidly as have Poland or Hungary in the early 1990s. The effects even of such reforms as have been introduced have been severe. In 1990 and 1991 national income fell by about a fifth. By the mid 1990s there were some signs of recovery. Bulgaria has considerable quantities of low quality coal and non-ferrous metals. It also has a significant tourist industry based in the Black Sea region.

Persecution of evangelicals, so common in the Cold War era, has sadly continued in the Bulgaria of the 1990s. This has been exacerbated by the clear involvement of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in this religious harassment. Baptists, Methodists and Pentecostals are all finding it difficult to function. Mistrust of First World Christianity has clearly played a part also. Evangelicals have been slandered and calumniated without right of reply. In practice they are seen as sects. These words, in a newspaper article in the Spring of 1993, are those of Nickolay Slatinsky of the Bulgarian Committee for National Security. 'Sects ruin the character, they brainwash and destroy the mind and break up the values of Bulgarians ... the awful calamity is that along with many of these sects and behind the cover of faith comes drugs, organized crime, terrorist groups and money laundering. We need to restore good relations instead with related Orthodox Churches in Russia, Greece and Romania'. A law passed early in 1994 by the Bulgarian Parliament targeted such sects, though mercifully the Baptists were not specified. 'Everybody knows that nobody from these groups will receive a new registration' said the General Secretary of the Bulgarian Baptist Union Boshidar Igoff. In Pasardic, Bulgaria a group of Baptist Christians, converted Muslims of Turkish background, came to Christ through the work of missionaries. The Bulgarian Baptist Union President Theo Angelov, whom it was my privilege to meet in person in Lillehammer that same Summer, invited these Christians to affiliate: 'The Union is open to receive them into our Baptist fellowship. This new congregation is in need of our prayers.'

In 1995 the Baptist Union of Bulgaria found itself at the centre of a fight to keep Baptist property in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. In Advent 1993, the BU had received permission to build a Church Centre including a school and orphanage on newly purchased property. The City Council had since

determined to get the property back, fuelled by anti-Baptist propaganda. 'Baptists eat babies for breakfast' was one headline in a national newspaper! The Council denied permission on the grounds of the bad influence that 'Baptists might have on people and especially on children'. Dr Denton Lotz of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) spearheaded the counter-attack and mobilised significant counter-opposition. The sheer volume of letters and international protests received by the City Council in Sofia had the desired effect. Among those writing were the British Union's Southern Baptist Association who have been developing twinning links with Bulgaria for many years now. In July, the Council agreed to allow the work to proceed, though with some restrictions. Angelov expressed deep gratitude for 'the prayers and support of our brothers and sisters in the Baptist world. Without the international pressure brought by these people, this would have been impossible. It is however possible that there will still be difficulties ahead' he warned. He was right. The underlying difficulties are still largely unresolved. Bulgaria has a population of 8.96 million people, 68% of whom live in urban areas. The main ethnic groups are Bulgarian (85.3%), Turkish 8.5%, Gypsy 2.6% and Macedonian 2.5%. The Bulgarian Baptist Union has some 30 churches and 2500 members.

#### **The former Czechoslovakia.**

After a Soviet coup in 1948, what was then Czechoslovakia fell under Soviet domination. A reform movement - *Socialism with a human face* - headed by Slovak Communist Party leader Alexander Dubcek was violently repressed in 1968. He was succeeded by the reactionary Gustav Husak whose normalisation policies in the 1970s and 80s resulted in severe cultural and economic decline. The creation in 1977 of Charter 77, a human rights movement, represented a milestone in the history of Czechoslovakian resistance to communism<sup>(3)</sup>. In the Autumn of 1989, street demonstrations led to the demise of the communist regime in what has become known since as *the velvet revolution*. In 1990, free elections were held and the former dissident and playwright Vaclav Havel became President. In June 1992, after further elections, Vaclav Klaus became the political leader of Czechoslovakia and, with much reluctance, oversaw the separation of the Czech and Slovak Republics.

The Czech Republic. The Czech Republic is very pro-Western, has an association agreement with the EU and is already linked to NATO through the Partnership for Peace scheme. Industry and mining account for over 60% of the country's production in recent years. Market reforms plunged the country into recession between 1990 and 1993 but by 1994 there were clear signs of a recovery underway. Machinery, fuels and industrial products account for about 60% of total exports. Tourism, especially to Prague, brings considerable

hard currency into the country. Government is by two chambers. The Parliament has some 200 deputies and elects the President. The Senate has some 81 members. Election is by proportional representation.

Slovakia. Slovakia became an independent nation in January 1993. The widely respected Michal Kovak was elected as the republic's first President. Independence has not proved the solve-all that many had hoped for however. Quite the reverse in fact. Economic reforms have floundered. Confrontational politics have also had a deleterious effect. The former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar was obliged to resign in March 1994 after a no-confidence vote in Parliament. Tensions with a sizeable Hungarian minority have also exacerbated the political situation. Slovakia remains heavily dependent on inefficient heavy industry. Output has collapsed in recent years and unemployment has risen sharply. Machinery and other equipment as well as fuels, chemicals and raw materials are the main exports, about half of which go to the EU with whom Slovakia also has an association agreement. The Tatra mountains offer considerable tourist potential but the overall economic forecast seems bleak. Government is by the Slovak National Council with its 150 deputies elected on a proportional representation basis. The Council elects the President.

In Litomerice, in the Czech Republic, a Baptist Centre for Ministry using a former monastery is being developed by the former General Secretary of what was the Baptist Union of Czechoslovakia: Jan Pospisil. Under his leadership the church there has grown from 50 members to 130. It has also planted three new churches: in Svadov, Terezin and Roudnice with plans to plant elsewhere in addition. Co-operative Baptist missionaries Kevin and Jan Rutledge attend the church and say 'These are phenomenal accomplishments for any church of any size. This growth shows the openness for the Gospel in the Czech Republic. Most new believers are young people who are searching for solidity in changing times'. The new Centre will include a coffee bar, a Christian media centre, a rest home for 25-30 elderly people and a temporary residence for 5-7 homeless people. As pioneered by the Polish Baptists elsewhere in the Baptist Second World, the church plan to use English courses in their evangelism. The church also boasts a splendid youth choir which travels across North Bohemia and which has also sung in Berlin and Copenhagen. The beginnings of what in Britain is called Association life can also be discerned in Litomerice. Eight pastors there agreed in September 1993 to form such an Association.

Prague itself is the new site for the International European Baptist Seminary as Réúshlikon moved there for classes due to begin in the Autumn of 1995. Bonnie Pertus a Christian worker from the USA commented on being part of

the preparatory work team. 'This is a busy construction site. There are a few American volunteers here who care very much about making a good environment for the seminary. There are also some Czech work teams who have been hired to do construction, and there are some Czech people working in the office. .... The building for volunteers has beds for thirty people, bathrooms, a kitchen and a large multi-purpose room for eating and socializing'. The Seminary's academic standing has already been significantly enhanced by entering into an agreement with the Protestant Charles University, part of the University of Prague. In time, it is hoped that the Seminary will become the internet web site for theological education across Europe with courses, videos, lectures and all available on their web-site. In 1994 the Czech and Slovak Baptists agreed to become two Baptist Unions at a meeting in Nesvady, Slovakia. Strong ties of fellowship would be maintained however, they resolved.

The Czech Republic has a population of 10.4 million people, 78% of who live in urban environments. The main ethnic groups are Czech, (63%), Slovak (32%) Hungarian (3.8%) and Polish (0.5%). The Baptist Union there has some 24 churches with 2200 members. The Slovakian republic has a population of 5.3 million people, 78% of which is urban. The population is almost completely Slovakian. The Slovakian Baptist Union has some 15 churches and 1843 members.

### Hungary

In October 1956 discontent with the Communist regime boiled over into an anti-Moscow uprising. The Soviet Union brutally put this down and installed Janos Kadar as head of Government. His brand of Communism came to be known as *goulash communism* and was based on the policy that 'all those who are not against us are with us'. In 1968 a comprehensive market-oriented reform programme was instituted. By the time of Communism's collapse in 1989, Hungary was well on the way to economic freedom from Moscow. 10% of economic activity had already been privatised. The collapse of the Communist economic network (COMECON) led to a deep recession in Hungary in 1991 with GDP falling by some 12%. By 1994 a modest recovery was being experienced.

One serious legacy of the Communist era is Hungary's huge foreign debt: estimated at around \$25 billion in 1993. Government is by the National Assembly with 386 members. Supreme power is invested in the Parliament based in a majestic building on the banks of the Danube in Budapest. The Assembly elects the State President and appoints the Prime Minister. From 1989-4, Hungary was governed by the Hungarian Democratic Forum. 'There were tensions among the Hungarian political parties that suggest the presence of a variety of cleavages, including such time-honoured dimensions of conflict

as left versus right and religion ... the political parties have (also) been plagued by internal strife and mutual mistrust among leading politicians<sup>(4)</sup>. In 1994 the Hungarian Socialist Party comprising former communists won back political power. It is clear that the Hungarian multi-party system, like many in the Second World, has still not settled.

In Budapest, the International Baptist Lay Academy (IBLA) continues to flourish based now in Szigetszentmiklos. By 1993, in under 4 years, some 200 students from 15 nations had studied through IBLA and had benefitted from its courses. Baptists from Virginia, USA have been developing close ties with the Hungarian Baptist Union. They have been helping them in building projects, evangelism, Sunday School work and work among women. The Lancashire and Cheshire Baptist Association in England has been similarly developing a partnership with Hungarian Baptists. In March 1995 the Hungarian Baptists celebrated the centenary of their weekly newspaper 'Bekehrnök' which was first published on March 15th 1895.

Hungary's population is 10.2 million, of which 62% lives in urban areas. The main ethnic groups are Magyar (96.6%), German (1.6%) and Slovak (1.1%). The Hungarian Baptist Union has 376 churches and 11,263 members.

### Poland

'Imposing Communism on Poland is like trying to put a saddle on a cow'. Stalin's celebrated remark has been amply confirmed by her post-War history. In 1990 Poland's first post-Communist government pioneered remarkable market-oriented reforms, nicknamed *the big-bang*. Inflation fell rapidly from its 1989 levels of 1000% but industrial production and living standards also fell in the early 1990s, while unemployment rose. As exports to the West increased and the privatised sector grew, foreign investors showed more interest. Poland, with others in the Second World, has considerable foreign debt obligations which are affecting economic recovery. Poland shows clear signs, nonetheless, of economic progress in the mid 1990s. The political scene has been instable with frequent collapses of coalitions and therefore changes of government in the 1990s. The elections in 1993 saw the return to power of a left-wing coalition with roots in the Communist Party. 'The 1993 elections spelt resounding defeat for Solidarity and to some extent also for the conservative and Catholic forces'<sup>(5)</sup>. The country's first non-Communist President Lech Walesa also found himself increasingly beleaguered. He was not the first to have found the problems of Government harder to negotiate than those of opposition. The reforms have remained firmly on course however.

The Baptist community in Poland has embraced the possibilities opened up by the New Europe with enthusiasm and dedication. In Wroclaw a splendid

Baptist Church Centre which includes a language school and Christian bookshop as well as a Protestant seminary and Church has seen dozens of baptisms and conversions in the 1990s. The Church has also been involved in radio broadcasting. The then Polish Baptist Union President, Konstanty Wiazowski, and his wife Jadzia visited Britain for the 1993 Baptist Assembly in Nottingham on a visit sponsored by Dagnall Street Baptist Church's Project Poland fund. Speaking at a seminar on East European Church life Konstanty chided British Baptists on our poor showing evangelistically. He drew attention, by contrast, to the phenomenal growth of Baptist Unions in the Second World. Polish and Belorussian Baptists in 1993 were winning converts at a ratio of 13:1; Ukrainian Baptists at a ratio of 11:1; Russian Baptists at 7:1 and Moldovan Baptists at 5:1. This compared with figures of 30:1 in England and 100:1 in Wales he commented!

On several occasions now it has been my privilege to see the emergence of the splendid new Baptist Seminary at Radosc to the south east of Warsaw. In September 1994 the new centre was officially opened. This was a decade after the then Communist régime leased the land to the Baptists on a 99 year lease. 'We decided it was logical to have several activities on the property' explained Wiazowski. 'It is ours for 99 years and that is clear. After that whoever is around at that time will have to worry what to do!' The project has been made possible because of generous support from the Polish Baptists, the skilled labour of Moldovan Baptists among others, and some significant support from First World Baptists. Gustaw Cieslar the Principal of the Seminary has an enthusiasm and commitment to the Seminary which are self-evident to all who know him.

The Seminary has four basic thrusts: academic, spiritual, practical and evangelistic. 'We need a lot but the first thing we need is prayers. That is often the hardest thing to get' he said. By 1995, when he visited us in England, already 17 students were in training. The rebuilt chapel at Radosc unfinished at the time of writing, which was a refuge for Jews and Christians alike during the War years, will complete the complex. Pastors are currently trained at Warsaw or at Wroclaw where Zigmund Karel is the Principal. Ordination does not occur until 3-5 years after a pastor finishes at the Seminary when the accreditation process is complete. In Lodz in September 1994 a long battle to regain Baptist property expropriated in the Communist years, ended with the return of the building to the Lodz Baptists by the local police! It is hoped that this success will mark the beginning of several such returns in the late 1990s.

The General Secretary of the Polish Baptist Union is Ryszard Gutkowksi. He has drawn up a 'Vision and Mission' project. The Polish Baptist Union is

divided into 9 Regions each guided by a Regional Pastor. Recent statistics reveal that the Union consists in the mid 1990s of some 60 or so Churches and of over 50 missions stations in addition covering the length and breadth of the land. 'God has called us to evangelize Poland. There is a new atmosphere of growth and co-operation' he shared in 1995 on another visited sponsored by our church. One of the aims is to plant new Baptist churches in every District capital of Poland. At the beginning of 1995, 24 out of 49 of these had no such church. Ryszard speaks of the 1990s as days that once they could once only have dreamed of. Between 1993-8 they have set themselves the target of planting at least 12 new churches (with over 25 members) as well as several more missions (with under 25 members). Materialism and Western goods are becoming as much an idol in contemporary Poland as Communism ever was, he warned. In many parts of Poland Baptists are finding tent missions and English language schools very effective evangelistically.

Another interesting aspect of Polish Baptist life, in this majority Catholic country, is the determination of the Baptists to maintain good ecumenical relationships without compromising the integrity of their Baptist beliefs. So as not to be marginalized, the Polish Baptist Union is represented on the National Ecumenical Council. During the 1995 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Konstanty Wiazowski preached in a central Warsaw Catholic church on the text 'I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me and I will abide in you'. Mark Edworthy a Southern Baptist church-planter has overseen the birth of a second Baptist Church in Warsaw. '85% of those who come are under thirty' he commented. The new church is based in Praha, a Warsaw suburb of some 300,000 people. In the Autumn of 1995 the Polish Baptists elected a new President Grzegorz Bednarczyk aged just 39. It was my privilege to witness this first hand. 'Leadership is leaning on God and all He gives. His grace and His strength. Pray for me.' he said at the time. British Baptist Union links with Poland are imaginatively handled by the East Glamorgan Baptist Association.

Poland has a population of some 38.4 million people; 62% live in urban areas. The nation is 98% Polish but some German and Ukrainian ethnic groups have also made a home in Poland. The Baptist Union has some 56 churches and 3335 members. One of their next projects is to redevelop their headquarters in ul Walicow, Warsaw.

### **Romania**

In 1988 the régime of the then Romanian leader Ceaucescu announced a policy of systemisation whereby some 7000 villages were to be demolished and their inhabitants resettled in ugly agro-industrial centres. The policy was typical of the kind of totalitarian solutions preferred by the Romanian dictator. 'A

Romanian type of neo-Stalinism was developed, reminiscent of the worst aspects of Stalin's rule.<sup>(6)</sup> Public unrest erupted conclusively in the Autumn of 1989 as the Romanian Communist leadership was the last to fall in Eastern Europe after a violent revolution. Suspicions have continued ever since, however, that these events were in fact a carefully planned coup by other Communist elements in the Government headed by Ion Iliescu. In 1992 the Salvation Front won power but in practice it has had to share this with Nationalists and former Communists. Links with the West have been actively sought. Romania has an association agreement with the EU. Tensions in the New Romania include problems with Hungary over the treatment of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania. Some Romanians are also arguing for reunification with Moldova. Romania is rich in hydrocarbons including oil. Under the Soviets, heavy industrialisation took place. Government is by Senate with 143 seats and a Chamber of Deputies with 341 seats. The President is appointed every four years and appoints the Prime Minister.

There are clearly many new doors for the Christian Gospel opening in post-Communist Romania. It is hard to communicate in just a few words the phenomenal initiatives in evangelism and church-planting taking place in the Romania of the 1990s. Pastor Viorel Iuga spoke in 1993 of his experiences travelling around Arad and area. 'Unsaved people everywhere realise that the revolution is not enough. I was in one village ... with a population of around 1000 inhabitants. The church hall was too small so we obtained the use of the House of Culture. In every service that week we had 50 church members and 200 or more unsaved people.' Pastor Iuga is President of the Arad Baptist Association with 100 churches and 10 missions. In 1994 the Romanian Baptist Union met to consider the task and significance of Baptists in Romania, a country where over 70% of the people are, at least nominally, Romanian Orthodox. The main topic was how best to maintain one Baptist Union including the strong Hungarian-Romanian Baptist Association. The Romanian government had made it clear that they did not want to see two Baptist Unions each representing different linguistic groupings. The Romanian Baptists agreed with this policy aiming to demonstrate the harmony to be found in Christ amidst all the diversity of contemporary Romania. Examples of the harassment of Romanian Baptists by some Orthodox believers were also shared.

In 1995 Oradea the Second Baptist Church completed the construction of a 3000 seat auditorium. This is just one part of an even larger project which includes a religious education building and a 50 bed hotel! Also in 1995 the Bucharest Baptist seminary received full government accreditation. 95% of all Romanian Baptist pastors train there. In 1995 the seminary had some 104 ministerial students. Students can read for degrees, inter alia, in Theology-Romanian, Theology-English or Theology-Social Work. Dr Vasile Talpos the

Seminary's President said 'I am celebrating a great achievement after four years of hard work. The accreditation has been our long term dream and it has now been fulfilled. ... We have worked hard for this but God has been with us and will continue to help us in our educational work. May His name be glorified'. Otniel Bunaciu, a former student of Regent's Park College, now lectures at the Seminary. He commented: 'My prayer is that God will give us the strength and wisdom to take the challenge of being better witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ on into the C21st.'

Romania has a population of 22.8 million which is 53% urban. Its main ethnic groups are 89% Romanian, 9% Hungarian and 0.4% German. The Romanian Union has some 1400 churches and 100,000 members and the Hungarian Baptist Association some 250 churches and 9000 members.

### **The Former Yugoslavia**

The fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia and the civil war which has resulted is one of the many tragedies of our century. By 1994 more than 200,000 people had died in this conflagration. The former Yugoslavian republic of Bosnia Herzegovina is a complex of several nationalities and religions. In 1991 the population of 4.4 million was 44% Muslim, 31% Serbian and 17% Croatian. Its leader through this period was President Alia Izetbegovic. Croatia was led in the early 1990s by the former Communist turned nationalist Franjo Tudjman. Government is by a House of Constituencies and a House of the Regions. Its population of 4.8 million is 78% Croat, 12% Serb and 1% Muslim. Macedonia is led by its President the former Communist Kiro Gligorov. Its Government is by Parliament - the Sobranie. Its population of 2 million is 65% Macedonian, 21% Albanian, 5% Turk and 3% Gypsy.

Serbia re-elected Slobodan Milosevic President in December 1992. It is governed by a 250 member Parliament - the Skupstina. Its population of 10.7 million is 63% Serbian, 14% Albanian, 6% Montenegrin and 4% Hungarian. Montenegro is in effect a province of Serbia even though a large minority wish for it to have independence. Slovenia has usually managed to keep clear of the civil war which has engulfed its near neighbours. Whereas all the other economies are effectively bombed out, under the leadership of President Milan Kucan, Slovenia has remained politically stable and has a well established manufacturing and tourist base. Market-oriented reforms have been introduced and economic recovery has resulted. Slovenia is governed by a State Assembly: a 90 member lower house and a 40 member upper house - the State Council. The President is elected for a five year term of office. He appoints the Prime Minister in consultation with Parliament. Slovenia has a population of 1.97 million, mainly Slovene (91%) but with Croat (3%) and Serb (2%) and Muslim (1%) minorities also present.

In 1992 Ken Sehested, Director of the North American Baptist Peace Fellowship, was a member of an inter-faith delegation which visited Croatia and Bosnia. He commented: 'My experience has consistently been that if you want to locate God's redemptive, hopeful movement find the places where life is being ruined, robbed and wrecked. Look into the face of hell. There God has positioned the elect, the faithful, the ones who know and trust the Gospel promise, the ones able to risk their security, even their lives for the sake of their neighbours in need.'. In 1993 Avram Dega, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Serbia explained that most of the Baptists there were not in fact Serbian but were Slovak, Romanian or Hungarian by ancestry. In Novi Sad a talented youth evangelist was ministering in the area with some success and a valuable childrens' work was going on. In Zagreb, Croatia Hilde Sayers of the European Baptist Womens' Union (EBWU) visited Croatia and saw, among all the devastation, the work of Baptist women there. 'I was amazed and pleased to see how active the Croatian women are and to witness the vision for outreach they have' she said. Among many acts of service are caring for the victims of rape, and for the babies born to them.

Youth pastor Zarko Dordevic said: 'God is with and for us in our troubles. As Baptists we no longer ask why? ... there are more and more baptismal services in our churches and it is possible now to share the Good News everywhere. In our churches Serbs, Croats, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians Gypsies and others are working together in humanitarian and social projects for youth'. He also warned against what he termed 'safari visits' by Christians from the First World which achieved little good or change. Studies were also continuing in 1993 in the seminary in Novi Sad and a Summer Course had attracted some 35 students. Frequent prayer vigils for peace have been held by Baptists all over the former Yugoslavia. In July 1994 it became clear that the civil war had also divided the small Baptist community and two Baptist Unions - Croatian and Serbian - were formed. The Serbian Union includes a few Baptist communities from Montenegro. Its President is Simo Ralevic. One of the Baptist churches in Belgrade was caring for some 2000 refugees; one of its two buildings had been destroyed. In 1995 the Croatian Baptist President Branko Lovrec nearly died in a Serb attack which included a cluster bomb. 'It was awful' he reflected. '6 people were killed and about 120 were wounded. Zagreb was empty and looked like a ghost city' In April 1995 39 Croatian Baptist delegates met in Assembly in April 1995 Zagreb. The Assembly was shown on State television. 'Our greatest need now is prayer' Lovrec said.

The Croatian Baptist Union has some 30 churches and just over 2000 members. The Serbian Baptist Union has some 51 churches and 1368 churches.

*Part two of this article can be found later in this magazine.*

# MISSIONARY MODELS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

If you haven't been through the Channel Tunnel yet, then I recommend it! Not that I would choose it in preference to the ferry: the swell of the sea and those greasy meals the British eat far too quickly are a cultural experience not to be missed! You have to take the Tunnel at least once because it changes your perception of Britain. Living only 3 hours from London, I no longer have to embark or disembark. The journey takes place in one swift movement, without sight or sound of sea, from Gare du Nord to Waterloo (or, in your case, the other way round!). Travel improvements change not only our perceptions but also our behaviour. From trading in the East Indies, through exploring Africa, to forming a European community, British Baptists have been adapting and changing their missionary focus over the last 200 years.

## Can we still expect great things?

Christian mission is just beginning! We might have had 2,000 years, but unless someone has the date of Christ's return in their diary, we can assume that the Church is only just getting into the stride of making His love known! Instead of a Church limited during most of the last two millennium to one-fifth of the globe, we can look forward to a truly world-wide Church. The facility of contact through speed of travel, satellite communication and instant computer translations are going to bring people closer together. Along with economic pressure and a certain instant "world culture" people are going to meet who otherwise would never have met. Resources will be increasingly shared. This co-operation back and forth around the world will change the face of the Church. Missionaries will no longer be predominantly white, but will come from Latin America, Africa and the Far East. This sharing of personnel and finance will cause Christians to seek after a greater justice and result in a spiritual harvest as yet unprecedented in world history.

The Western church will be saved as through fire. Its heritage will be reduced to that of confessional faith. The emerging multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-denominational world church will find its unity in mission to the world. Its light-weight structures will give it flexibility and allow it to develop and adapt more easily in the context of on-going and rapid change. No country will be seen as outside the orbit of missionary activity. Neither because they are too proud of their Christian past, nor because they remain officially closed to the Gospel. Missionaries will not always be known by that name and many will have secular jobs. These will vary from vocational training to manual work but the priority will be the same: to form groups of Bible reading, praying Christians who seek to serve Christ where they live.

### What attempts are being made?

If we are to look solely at our own Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) which acts as a specialist international agency for British Baptist mission, we can see that it is making definite attempts to prepare for the new millennium.

It is important for us to hear its recent affirmations that it is an evangelical organisation. Initiatives such as the young people's 28:19 Action Teams and talk about creating a fellowship of "tent makers" are all good signs of a change of image. But the biggest and most important change that is taking place is that of its self-understanding. It is no longer a "sender" but an "enabler". An enabler helps mission to take place wherever the initiative comes from. A sender, on the other hand, implies action taken on behalf of another. Until recently this was the view that dominated much of mission work. The benefactor took an initiative on behalf of the receiver. This way of looking at the world cannot be applied to the new millennium. If international mission, that involves British Baptists, is to take place, be it in the British Isles or in Bangladesh, the BMS is there as a facilitator and not as an organiser.

If this paradigm shift is to be complete, further changes need to take place. One of the most difficult, no doubt, will be a change of name! I must confess that I thought I had joined a club of ornithologists when I first went to the BMS General Committee and heard everyone talking about "The Society". Whilst it has retained its autonomy as a separate Baptist organisation, the time may well be here for it to take the ineluctable step of becoming something like a "board of mission" for British Baptists. It can only be hoped that the newly founded Fellowship of British Baptists will further this streamlining of Baptist identity in the United Kingdom.

The other part of its name which needs an overhaul is the word "missionary". Not only are the words "missionary" and "mercenary" uncomfortably close in an unstable environment, as I have experienced; but many countries are closed to missionaries or consider the term pejorative. Though I believe the strength of human contact is of primary importance in the work of mission, it needs to be recognised that the enabling of mission does not just consist in personnel. Financial aid, literature, scholarships and so on are also an important aspect of world mission. So, yes, a change of name for the new millennium!

Another change that we need to look for in this shift from "sender" to "enabler" is the way that missionaries and overseas partners relate to their British counterparts. Having been with the BMS for 8 years now, I am surprised at how many times the term BMS means Didcot. Having lived through the change in Home Assignment patterns; the purchase of Baptist House; the management review and its implementation; changes in computer systems and so on, I'm left waiting and wondering where the missiological

thinking is taking place? How can we learn to church plant cross-culturally? What does it mean to evangelise a "post-Christian" culture? How does the idea of partnership work in practice? Should we have specialised teams available for medical work or evangelistic events? How can we use our limited financial resources and our valuable human resources to maximum effect?

These primary questions need urgent discussion. This discussion should not centre around Didcot and its committees but around its missionaries and partner churches. With only one full-time Director with any missionary experience, and a General Committee which is drawn from Association delegates, it may not be altogether surprising that the change from "sender" to "enabler" is not always clearly seen! The BMS needs to reappraise its General Committee; look for ways in which those who are working abroad can have a pro-active voice and make sure that its engagement in missiological study remains a priority.

### It's for God and all that!

Losing touch with the past. Cutting the boat from its moorings. These are the fears of those who are uncertain of such change. But the best way to keep the BMS - or whatever it's eventually called - afloat and in direct lineage with its past is to keep God in view. Don't let an organisation or even an inspired individual take charge. Mission is God's affair. That's why we all need to be involved. Mission isn't about being on a committee; it's about helping each other share God's love. That's why your church may be looking to the BMS to help you find the right way to reach your multi-national neighbourhood. That's why your church is going to extend itself overseas through partnership with the BMS.

Your church phone bill is going to have international calls made on it. Some of the best of your members are going to be helped to go and serve on short-term work teams: building a church, helping in a hospital, doing street evangelism. This isn't Christian tourism, but long-term commitment to struggling and sometimes discouraged Christian brothers and sisters.

Your missionaries - whether adopted by your church or coming from among you - are going to be supported and encouraged. Your pastor is going to be sent to see them and you are going to look into ways of using electronic mail to keep the contact alive. Don't wait for the missionary to keep your interest up, make them feel loved, supported and prayed for, even if you don't get any returns!

Missionary interest will grow so that there will no longer be a ban on missionaries speaking at the annual Baptist Assembly. Mainstream will feature them in its programme. Churches who feel successful will no longer push the missionary to a mid-week event but will let them speak at their Sunday

services. Well managed sound-bites are alright, but they are not sufficient! If we want a model for the new millennium we could do no better than to look back to William Carey himself! Influenced by the Great Awakening, unwilling to "shut up and sit down"; persevering against the odds; distrustful of the committee back home; wanting to empower the national church. We, perhaps, find a more common cause with him today than with much of the history of missionary expansion which separates his time from ours. His was a world without Christ, a time for breaking with the Christendom of the past for the sake of the Kingdom. Let us also "enlarge our tent"!

*John H S Wilson.*

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## **TOWARDS A MISSIONARY CONGREGATION**

*Can a church with a membership of 40 become partners with a church that has ten times that number of members?*

That was a question posed by Peter Tongeman when he was SE Area Superintendent in 1991. The partnership was to be between Park Road Baptist Church, which is a town centre church in Bromley, SE London, and Bromley Common Baptist Church, which is situated about 1.5 miles south in a socially mixed and spiritually needy area. At that time the student pastor of the church, Ray Bell, was being invited to consider the possibility of staying at the church in a full-time capacity. Two problems arose:-

The church could not afford to pay him even with Home Mission help. £4,000 was needed and it seemed that the church at Park Road might be able to offer that financial help.

Because the membership at Bromley Common was predominantly elderly and Ray and his wife were in their early 40s with three young children, it was considered advisable that they had some access to, and input from, a larger and wider church family.

Cautious negotiations took place in the light of the Area Superintendent's mission initiative and, after overcoming some initial hesitations, with the fear that there could be a takeover bid by the larger church, an agreement was reached which resulted in a partnership, initially for three years, and which has, at present, been extended for a fourth year. The partnership began with a number of hopes, some of which have been fulfilled. Ray, as the pastor at Bromley Common, has had a clear input into the church at Park Road, spending one day a week at the church and having an input particularly in its 20 to 40 age group. He has also taken responsibility for a group of 20+ young

people who meet on a Sunday evening for discussion, Bible study and fellowship.

Preaching opportunities have also been taken up and he has had an effective role in the local Baptist Region in supporting initiatives in Home Mission. The church at Park Road has been able to supply six or seven workers to help with the children and young people's work at Bromley Common. A prayer group has been formed to support the work of the church there and other occasional visits have been made. Hopes that there might be close bonds between all the members of the churches proved to be unrealistic. Time constraints and geographical limitations have made it impossible. Nevertheless, representative leaders have met every six months to chart the progress of the experiment and an overall climate of trust and confidence has been steadily built up. Gradually new people are being prompted to identify with the mission of the area and to link up with the smaller church.

The partnership has, in many respects, been very fruitful. Stories can be told of people who have come to faith, renewed faith and deepened faith. The larger church has benefited from the mission strategy and outlook of the smaller church in renewing its own structures and work. Financial generosity has encouraged others to be sacrificial in their giving to God's work. Three lessons really come out of this story as it can be reviewed over a three year period:-

Partnership and interdependence are not only essential New Testament principles, but marvellously beneficial practices in the church of the present day. This is a partnership that has worked for mission. Other churches in the local Baptist Region are taking up the idea and much good can come of it. It is not a new idea, but one that can receive new conviction by our particular experience.

It is a more popular thing to plant a new church than to try and renew and revamp an existing one. It has been difficult to motivate Christians to see the work at Bromley Common as a missionary opportunity to which they ought to move. In many ways the task of resuscitation and renewal proves far less attractive than that of initial planning.

It is clear that many of us still find it difficult simply to obey the command of Jesus to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" and to see ourselves as a missionary people. Nevertheless, this partnership has enabled a pastor, his wife and their three young children to be seen as a missionary family in needy territory and requiring of good support.

*Mike Nicholls is Minister at Park Road Baptist Church, Bromley, Kent.*

## *Before Probation.*

John James, in his "letter to the Churches" encouraged us to associate together and set an example of loyalty. From my experience during the last few years as a leader in a church without a minister, I wish to issue a challenge.

**To find ways of developing meaningful relationships between larger and smaller churches**

Sometimes I wonder is it possible to make Baptist identity meaningful for small charismatic churches? More than two-thirds of the members in our church come from non-Baptist backgrounds, many from AOG and independent evangelical churches. To most, association and other BU structures seem irrelevant - except in times of crisis. Let me say though that my personal experience of the Association officers has been very encouraging and supportive.

It appears to many that the successful churches are not Baptist ones but those with different structures/distinctives, raising the question, why be a Baptist? If we are to make Baptist identity meaningful we need to find ways of articulating the belief that congregational government, local church autonomy (and interdependence) and radical discipleship are Spirit-inspired, Biblical and relevant. We must demonstrate that such things work in practice if they are not to be discarded as cultural baggage from a past era.

The needs of smaller churches are different. We do not have a full-time minister and rely more on input from outside. We don't just need pulpit supply but regular contributions from people who are able to give significant input into the life of the church. The need is not simply in terms of preaching but also insight from mature leaders on a more strategic level. Currently the most ready/obvious sources of support come from those outside Baptist circles. Some years ago I was part of a "new-church" where the concept of regional support was more developed and where providing quality teaching and leadership advice to smaller churches was the norm. It is still the case that those churches and leaders most willing to help us come from outside our Union.

Support does not have to be one-way. Smaller churches have a contribution to make. Our churches contain people who are part of a smaller church because they can make a significant contribution; many have gifts and talents that could be used more widely. For example, until recently one person in our church was the local education authority's Advisor on Religious Education. Small churches can be object lessons to larger ones. With fewer members *sometimes* we are more adaptable and change faster and so can provide an example to others of what can be done with limited resources. But we are not

omni-competent. We need help in areas we are less good at, if our churches are to grow and mature. This requires us to develop relationships between large and small churches.

I believe we need to develop regional teams who are willing to work together in areas such as worship, evangelism, children's work. Teams made up of folk from a range of churches able to give time on a regular basis, maybe including those with gifts and experience who are in a position to work with a local church over a longer period to develop others. This may not be easy, especially when time and resources are already stretched. But the needs are there and growing. If this network is to become a network of churches - and not simply a support group for ministers in various stages of burn-out (which I may be grateful for myself in due course!) - we have to find ways to support and encourage other church fellowships.

*Neil Brighton.*

*Neil moves this month to Spurgeons to train for the ministry. He has served in Radford Semele Baptist Church, nr Leamington Spa, Warwicks.*

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## THE NEW EUROPE (2)

### THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

#### The former Baltic States.

As Mikhail Gorbachev's liberalising reforms took hold of the former Soviet Union the desire for independence deepened in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Baltic States. In 1988 the Popular Front of Estonia was formed and in 1989 Estonian became the official language. In 1991 Estonian independence was first declared and then recognised by the UN. The first free elections were held in 1992 and brought a right wing coalition to power with Lennart Meri as President. Government is by a 101 member Parliament, the Riigikogu.

Since independence, Estonia has sought to wean itself away from the former Soviet Union, politically, culturally and economically. It has clashed with Russia on its Aliens Law which declares that all non-Estonians are foreigners. Under Soviet rule, industrialisation involved engineering, metalworking, electronics and the production of consumer goods



as well as the growth of timber and paper industries. After independence, a programme of rapid privatisation took place. By 1994 there were some signs of these policies beginning to have the desired effect. The Estonians have also successfully introduced their own currency: the kroon.

In 1993 the European Baptist Press Service (EPBS) announced that after a 'pause' of 50 years, the theological seminary in Tartu, Estonia was about to open its doors again. After the political changes of 1989, the school reopened on the property of the Baptist Union in Tallinn. Since 1990 the Seminary had been meeting in rooms of the Kolgat Church in Tartu. Now they operate from a brand new campus. The main Seminary course is a four year one geared to pastors, teachers and Christian workers. There are also one year courses in mission and on serving as a Deacon. Particular mention was made of the support to Estonian Baptists from the Baptist Union of Sweden: money, tools, duplicators, and stationery for example. There are also signs of new church buildings and growth elsewhere in Estonia. A new enthusiasm characterises the Union in the post-Communist era. One example of this is the existence of some 95 Baptist choirs and music groups in Estonian churches with some 1770+ members! 'God has heard the prayers for Estonia of many Christians and has granted us a special time of religious liberty. We are very grateful for that' they declared.

Estonia has a population of 1.54 million, 72% of which is urban. Its main ethnic groups are Estonian (61.5%), Russian (30.3%), Ukrainian (3.2%) and Belorussian (1.8%). The Baptist Union has some 6000 members in 83 churches.

The desire for independence in Latvia was triggered by Gorbachev's reforms. In September 1991 independence was declared. The situation was exacerbated by confrontation with Moscow over the status of ethnic Russians and the issue of the removal of Russian troops from the nation. In June 1993, the majority of Russians were prevented from voting in elections. Latvia, under the Soviet régime, produced such goods as railway carriages, buses, freezers, fertilisers and consumer goods. Instability followed independence as the economic shock of breaking free from the former Soviet Union was felt. In 1992 national income fell by some 33% and inflation rose to just under 1000%. By 1993 this had fallen back to 10% and 100% respectively. Radical economic reforms and privatisation measures have been implemented and the signs are that these will bear fruit in the late 1990s. Government is by Parliament with 100 deputies elected on the basis of proportional representation.

Latvia has a population of some 2.63 million people, 71% of which is urban. The main ethnic groups are Latvian (52%), Russian (34%), Belorussian (4.5%) and Ukrainian (3.4%). The Latvian Baptist Union has some 70 churches and 5330 members.

In Lithuania a pro-independence movement Sajudis was formed in 1988. In March 1990, the Lithuanian Parliament headed by Vytautas Landsbergis declared independence. Moscow applied intense political and economic pressure to seek to prevent this becoming a reality. Quite rightly, as it turned out, the Kremlin feared the domino effect on other Soviet Republics. 13 demonstrators died in anti-Moscow street protests in January 1991; by September the Soviet Union itself was in disarray and independence was finally won. A deep economic crisis in 1992 led to election victories by former Communists. They were headed by Algirdas Brazauskas who set about sweetening relationships with Russia. Under the Soviet Union, rapid industrialisation had taken place as had the collectivisation of agriculture. In 1991 industry accounted for 43% of national income and agriculture for 30%. GDP fell initially but by 1993 some signs of economic recovery were evident.

In June 1993 the Lithuanian Baptist Union, otherwise known as the Union of Free Evangelical Baptist Churches, held its first meeting for 53 years! 80 representatives met in the Klaipeda Baptist Church, where 60 years previously the Union had been formed. The Union's Chairman Albertas Latuzis described the scene: 'With gratefulness to God and joy we sang hymns, we worshipped, we shared our faith and learned from our guests and from each other how to find the solution of our problems and needs'. Prior to the Assembly, with American Baptist help, seminars on evangelism, church-planting, discipleship and church growth were held. 'The greatest need now is Christian literature in the Lithuanian language and the first is the complete Bible in modern Lithuanian.' Other needs are Sunday School materials and a hymn book. 'All these needs demand means and educated persons who would be able to do this work without worrying about their living expenses' Latuzis continued. 'At this time our Union has no means even to employ one staff member and no one of our congregations is able to pay the salary for their pastor. Though we are very few in number we believe God can do great things from a little using as co-workers our brothers and sisters in other countries also.' The Lithuanian BU paid particular tribute to support from the EBF and German Baptists here.

Lithuania has a population of some 3.74 million people, 68% of whom live in urban areas. The main ethnic groups are Lithuanian (80%), Russian (8.6%) and Polish (7.75). The Lithuanian Baptist Union has some 26 churches and 320 members.

### **Belorussia**

In 1988 nationalist, pro-independent forces began to mobilise in this, one of the most loyal of all of the former Soviet Union republics. Zyanon Pazynek chaired the Popular Front. In 1990 the Front won 16% of the seats in elections

to the Belorussian Parliament. After the 1991 attempted coup against Gorbachev, Belorussia (or Belarus) declared independence, though in practice it has continued to cling to the remnants of the Communist system. Conservatives in Parliament have consistently refused to enact political and economic reforms. During the Soviet period, the republic was the world's third largest producer of tractors as well as a major producer of trucks and motorcycles. The nation's industry accounted for 50% of its GDP in 1991. The country remains heavily dependent on supplies of raw materials and fuels from Russia. The failures to initiate economic reforms are having damaging effects. In 1992 and 1993 national income fell. Hyperinflation also took hold of the economy. Belorussia, also known as Belarus, is governed by a Supreme Soviet (Soim) with 360 deputies.

In February 1994, the Baptist Union of Belarus appointed a new President, Alexandre Firisiuk who had recently returned from Moscow to live in Belarus. Viktor Krutskoi and Josef Rashkovski were also appointed as vice-Presidents. In March 1994, the General Secretary of the EBF, Karl Heinz Walter drew attention to the fear of 'foreignization' present in countries like Belarus, where the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists were meeting that month. After sheltering from the First World for over seven decades the sounds and pictures of MTV (music television) or of American Mormon missionaries knocking on the door comes as quite a shock! 'The overwhelming Western influence is frightening people more and more. ... Eastern European nations need an expression of faith that is true to their national identities' he said. Herr Walter also drew attention to the diversity that Baptists in the West take for granted but which East European Baptists find very disconcerting. 'To bring these together and not to split is one of the real tasks the EBF has to do' he continued.

The Golgotha Baptist Church in Minsk, Belorussia has the pleasant problem of a waiting list for Sunday School. Parents wish to protect their children from Western decadence, materialism and false teachings, hence the unprecedented demand for places. The nation continues to live with the aftermath of Chernobyl. The areas around Minsk and Brest as well as the areas around Gomel and Mogilev are all 'officially' contaminated areas. The EBF Children of Chernobyl project has been particularly appreciated by the Belorussian Baptists. During June to September 1994, for example, groups of Chernobyl-affected children were brought to the First World for a holiday lasting three to four weeks. The change in climate brought about a general improvement in health and outlook and, it seems, some strengthening of their immune systems. The population of Belorussia is some 10.27 million people, 66% of whom live in urban areas. The main ethnic groups are Belorussian (78%), Russian (13%) and Polish (4%). The Belorussian Baptist Union has some 135 churches and 9927 members.

## Georgia

Many Georgians welcomed the collapse of the Soviet Union and in 1991 elected Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a dissident nationalist, as President. His divisive and dictatorial rule ended in a coup in December 1992. His successor was Eduard Shevardnadze, the former minister of foreign affairs of the Soviet Union. His new régime faced a strong separatist movement in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as conflict with Gamsakhurdia's home region of Mingrelia. Only Russian military coercion prevented Georgia from disintegrating altogether as a result. Crime and terrorism are part of these conflicts. Shevardnadze himself was nearly assassinated in August 1995 as this article was being researched and written. The price of Russian support was and is an enforced link with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), much to the anger of many Georgians. The largest economic sector of Georgia is agriculture, helped by a warm climate and mountainous terrain. Georgia has substantial mineral resources such as manganese. The country depends heavily on imported fuel from Russia. Since independence, output has fallen considerably and inflation has risen sharply. Government is by the Supreme Council with 234 members.

While preparing material for this study of the New Europe, it was good to meet with the new Georgian Baptist Union President Malkhaz Songulashvili. He is a scholar who teaches art and church history at the University in Tbilisi. He too was on study leave at Regent's. Malkhaz shared with me something of his vision for Georgia in these exciting times of opportunity. With the help of the EBF the Georgian Baptist Union was able, in 1993, to purchase 17 houses for new Baptist congregations. Karl Heinz Walter commented at that time: 'Georgia is far behind other areas in its development. They are more isolated than others, especially since the civil war began. To break through the isolation will cost more than in other areas.' The Georgian Baptist Union has been involved in refugee work after the civil war.

In Gurujani, to the east of the country, a new church has been built to accommodate a congregation of 200 members which has grown up within the last ten years. In Apheni, a town of 7000 people, in 2 years four new Christian groups have been planted, each with 25-30 people or more meeting. Two Baptist evangelists have been travelling the country lecturing on the Christian Faith. In Tbilisi there is a Russian Baptist church with some 600 members. In late 1994, top level meetings of Baptist leaders including Karl Heinz Walter were held with Georgian political leaders. Problems of religious harassment by the Georgian Orthodox Church were shared with them and with Ilja II that Church's head. Karl Heinz Walter commented on the economic situation there after a return visit. 'It is depressing at the moment, because I do not see any progress in the economic situation but I have hope that the situation will

improve in the future.'

Georgia has a population of 5.46 million people, 56% of which is urban. Its main ethnic groups are Georgian 68.8%, Armenian 9%, Azeri 5.1% and Ossetian 3.2%. In 1994 the Baptist Union had some 35 churches and 2000 members. Malkhaz updated that figure as we talked. In the Summer of 1995, he told me with some joy, the figure was around 50 churches with many more missions and a community of over 5000 Baptists.

### **Moldova**

Moldova was the smallest republic in the former Soviet Union. Since independence its stability has been undermined by tensions with Russian separatists, especially in the Transdnistr region whose instability also affects Romania and the Ukraine. Nationalists gained a majority in the 1990 Parliamentary elections. Independence was achieved in 1991 but was followed by near civil war involving the Transdnistr separatists and 150,000 or so ethnic Christian Turks - the Gagauz. This was ended only by forceful intervention by Russia. Moldova is part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which has tried to link part of the former Soviet Union together in the 1990s. The peace remains uneasy. Moldova's economy remains strongly agricultural. Tiraspol in the Transdnistr region is the chief industrial centre. Moldova cannot afford to lose it. The collapse of the former Soviet Union has badly affected Moldova. National income fell by 30% in 1992 and by 10% in 1993. Foreign investment, not least in agribusiness, may help Moldova turn the corner economically. In February 1994 a new Parliament was elected by the 104 member Assembly.

In September 1993 the EBF council met in Moldova. Delegates were welcomed by an orchestra, and by young people in national costume offering food and drink. State television captured the occasion. Simultaneously with the Council over 200 Baptists women from all over Europe met at the Central Baptist Church in Kishinev. The Moldovan Baptist Union President Victor Loghinov and their General Secretary Victor Popovich used the occasion evangelistically. They included two public meetings in the schedule. One was held in the National Palace Theatre using the 85 voice Beltsy Baptist Choir. A similar evening in another local theatre featured testimonies, music and the dedication of Moldovan Baptist missionary/evangelists. The evangelists have a church-planting brief and were to be supported for two years in part by the EBF. Another example of the spirit of the occasion was the provision of fuel for a day's sight-seeing for the EBF representatives. All over the Kishinev area Baptists provided fuel, in acts of great sacrifice and generosity, when it became clear that the trip could not happen at all without this.

Among many issues the 1993 Council considered was the charismatic

movement which many Second World Baptists continue to view with deep suspicion. The subject, as always, roused deep feelings on both sides of the question. The freedom to differ without breaking fellowship, so much a part true Baptist heritage, was much in evidence. Some Baptist leaders also had opportunity to meet with the Moldovan President Dr Petru Lucinschi who affirmed a commitment to religious liberty and equality for all Moldovans. The new Moldovan constitution for the 1990s contained clauses prohibiting people from changing religions. The President promised to reassess this. 'In former times' he said 'there was no such law but it was used against you. Nowadays the law exists but no-one pays any attention to it. ... If it is true that this law goes contrary to international conventions such as the Helsinki Final Act then we will change the law.'

Moldova's population is 4.5 million. 47% of these live in urban areas. The main ethnic groups are Moldovan (64.5%), Ukrainian (13.8%); Russian (13%) and Bulgarian (2%). The Moldovan Baptist Union has some 225 churches and 17,800 members.

### **Russia**

When Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982 after nearly two decades in power he was succeeded for just three years by Yuri Andropov. No-one could have anticipated the changing of the known world that would result from the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as the next Communist Party leader. He was convinced that the Soviet system had reached the end of the road and so sought to introduce political and economic reforms. It would seem that he was also convinced this could be achieved without driving the Soviet Union into chaos or disintegration. On those counts at least he was wrong. By 1990 it was clear that glasnost and perestroika (openness and reconstruction) had 'failed.' Crisis followed crisis as more and more Republics expressed the desire to secede from the Union. An attempted coup in 1991 collapsed but Gorbachev's power was significantly weakened in the process. A looser federation of the former Republics was formed known as the Commonwealth of Independent States. The recently re-elected Russian President Boris Yeltsin himself survived a coup attempt in 1993 but was then undermined by elections which saw Nationalists and Communists doing surprisingly well. In 1994 Russia signed a co-operation agreement with the EU and a partnership agreement with NATO. Nominally Russia compares well with many Western countries. Under the Soviet system, high standards of education were achieved, especially in scientific and technical areas. There was also some kind of welfare safety net.

With the move to a market economy much changed. Racketeering and crime have taken off. Some Russians entrepreneurs have become very rich indeed,

while ever increasing numbers find themselves in desperate poverty. Inflation reached 1350% in 1992. Russia is rich in mineral resources and in human potential. The Communist era left it with a sorry legacy however: worn-out, low tech, energy consumptive heavy industry managed by people who produced shoddy goods that no-one given a choice wanted anyway. Agriculture was also inefficient: for example bumper crops went to waste as transportation problems occurred. Diversification of the defence industry has been a significant success. Russia is governed by a bi-cameral legislature: the Duma with 450 deputies and the Federation Council with 178 deputies. The President is elected to serve for five years.

Writing in the Keston Institute magazine 'Frontier' Brian Cooper spoke of Baptist growth in the former Soviet Union. This is, he wrote, the 'most dynamic epoch of upheaval development and expansion since they became active in the late C19th Tsarist Empire.' Across the whole of the former Soviet Union there are some 250,000 baptised members. Together with non-baptised members of the congregations the total Baptist community could be as large as 500,000 people in over 3000 churches.<sup>(7)</sup> Speaking at the 1993 Russian Baptist Congress, a representative of Boris Yeltsin declared; 'Christianity gives great support and great hope for the spiritual revival of the nation. You Baptist churches make a big contribution in this. We deeply appreciate your social and spiritual service.' Who could have anticipated such a tribute in the Cold War decades! In the early 1990s, several Baptist seminaries and Bible Institutes opened across the former Soviet Union. The Moscow Bible Institute celebrated its Jubilee anniversary in 1993 and already has extension centres in Kiev, Odessa, Minsk, Alma Ata and Krasnoyarsk. In October of 1993 the Baptist Theological Seminary in Moscow opened its doors. In St Petersburg an inter-denominational theological academy has been established in conjunction with Fuller Theological Seminary in California, USA. Russian Baptist leaders hoped that the burgeoning of such centres will provide well-trained ministers for hundreds of churches, currently without Baptist pastors.

In Irkutsk, Siberia, an industrial city of some 750,000 people the number of Baptist churches has doubled from 14 to 30 as has the membership: from 600 to 1100. Michael Sergie Tolmachev has been the 'bishop' of the Irkutsk region for ten years -Russian Baptists usually apply this title to their association directors. He is overseeing this exciting period of outreach and growth. 16 missionaries are working in 9 locations to plant new churches. Many young people in their teens and twenties are turning to Christ. In Krasnoyarsk at a meeting attended by Karl Heinz Walter, attended by 120 young people, he learned that half had been baptized within the past two years. In Angarsk, also in Siberia, a middle-school teacher has led everyone of her art class students to faith in Christ. Her father is one of the 16 missionaries working

with the Irkutsk Baptist Association. 'The most rewarding moment was when the students had to present their posters in front of the whole class. It became a worship service' said Elaine Kutas. 'The testimonies of some of the students were so meaningful to them that they shed tears explaining their new-found faith.'

In 1993 EBF leaders met with the Russian Baptist Union leadership to assess their part sponsorship of some 86 missionary evangelists working all over the CIS. The Russian Baptist Union's then President Vitaly Logvinenko spoke movingly of the EBF support which had made this possible. That same year saw the emergence of a new generation of Russian Baptist leaders. Piotr Konovalchik was elected President at the age of 53. He shared a vision for church-planting all over Russia and for a related network of Sunday schools. 'I don't consider the evangelism of Russia is only our business. We are asking for your help as well' he said to First World Christian leaders present. 'You prayed for us for 70 years, you wanted to help, you preserved Baptist work in Russia. Now it is time to give' In addition other younger leaders were appointed. Yuri Sipko as Vice-President aged just 33 years. Alexander Kozynko (43) became President of the Moscow theological seminary and Sergie Sannikov (33) President of the Ukrainian seminary.

During 1994 some worrying examples of the persecution and harassment of Baptists and other Protestants by Orthodox believers came to light. In July 1994 in Elektrougli, for example, an evangelistic mission was attacked by members of the Black Hundred a nationalistic organisation led by a Russian Orthodox priest Father Dmitri Shtilmark. Pickets were set up; a puppeteer's room was smashed up; a chauffeur had his life threatened and leaflets were circulated speaking of 'this Satanic sect' and of children being prepared for mass suicide!<sup>(8)</sup> This example puts in perspective the high level declaration signed in Moscow after an International Inter-confessional Conference a few weeks earlier in June 1994. Signatories included the Russian Orthodox leader Patriarch Alexei. 'We believe that in order to reduce inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, social and civil tensions it is necessary that every member of society should realize his duty to treat people of other nationalities, social groups, cultures and faiths and political convictions with love and respect ... and to actively oppose any manifestations of enmity or hatred which divide people.'<sup>(9)</sup>

Russia has a population of some 149 million people, 74% of them living in urban areas. The main ethnic groups are Russian (81.5%), Tatars (3%) and Ukrainians (1.2%). The Russian Baptist Union has some 1050 churches and 78,848 members.

### **Ukraine**

The movement towards Ukrainian independence was spearheaded by the former communist, Leonid Kravchuk who was elected President in 1991. The process has not run smoothly, however. Former Communists refused to co-

operate with some of the economic reforms that would have revitalised the stagnant economy. The 1994 elections also failed to resolve this stalemate. One of the underlying fears that has paralysed progress was that the nationalist west and the mainly Russian and industrialised east would end up in schism. Also in the Crimean peninsula there are secessionist tendencies which go back, in part, to Khrushchev's gift of the Crimea to Ukraine in 1954! Ukraine's nuclear missile capability has also led to clashes with Russia as has the issue of ownership of the Black Sea Fleet. Meanwhile the economy has plunged still more deeply into trouble. In 1992, national income fell by 12%. By 1993 the country had a budget deficit which was 40% of the entire GDP and inflation was well over 50% a month. The country's currency - the karbovanets - was in effective freefall. Ukraine was unable in 1994 to pay for oil and gas already received from Russia who were threatening to seize assets in payment instead. Government is by Supreme Council. The President is elected by direct vote and has the right to appoint the Prime Minister.

Baptist work in the Ukraine began between in the 1870s. Their first Congress was held in 1882 together with Russian Baptists. Michael Nakonechny, director of the Ukrainian Baptist Union's youth committee and the Union's executive secretary Victor Kulbeeck spoke to the EBF's conference of youth and childrens' workers in 1993. Work had been going on in prisons, hospitals, schools and colleges. A Baptist church in Kiev has established a Christian clinic with 10 doctors which, the previous Summer, had treated some 400 adults and 700 children. Both speakers told of many stories of 'how the Lord is close to people who otherwise are alone and of how the hearts of many are prepared to accept the Lord'. An annual festival for youth brings 1000 young believers together for a week of praise, teaching and celebration. The Ukrainian Baptist Union is the largest Baptist community on the European mainland and continues to grow. The Union established 200 new churches in 1990-3. In 1994 Gregory Komendant was appointed President. Much building work is taking place and the Ukrainian Baptists are also involved in radio broadcasting work. Their two seminaries - in Kiev and Odessa - are preparing some 300 students for ministry.

In September 1994 a second Ukrainian Baptist Union was welcomed by the EBF meeting in Dorfweil, Germany. The Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches and Ministries of Ukraine had for several decades under Communism met underground. Their president Nikolay Velitchko pastors one of their 50 or so congregations. His church has a membership of some 1300 people, a very active Sunday School, two choirs and an orchestra. Members visit prisons and evangelise openly. In just one year the church baptised 100 new members and organized 6 new churches. The main Ukrainian Baptist Union gladly accepted this addition to the EBF family. As we have seen earlier, the Ukraine remains seriously affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe. The Ukrainian Baptists like the Belorussian ones, have benefitted from the

EBF's Children of Chernobyl projects.

The Ukraine has a population of some 52 million people; 67% of these live in urban areas. The main ethnic groups are Ukrainian (73%) and Russian (22%). The Ukrainian Baptist Union has some 1300 churches and over 106,000 members.

### Summary.

Praxis in the Second World then. We have seen a familiar pattern across the Second World.

- Countries experimenting with economic and political reforms with very mixed results.
- Longings for independence turning to disillusionment.
- A hankering for the 'Egypt's' of more recent memory.
- New nations discovering how hard it is to achieve full independence in an economically interdependent world.
- The benefits and problems of First World Capitalism: economic recovery and wealth for some and the problems of increasing crime and poverty for others.

As for Second World Baptist life in the 1990s this is deeply impressive. With limited resources in material terms and in all the turmoil of economies and democracies struggling to be reborn, spiritual rebirth is also happening all over the Second World. This article surely confirms the view that the future of Christianity in the C21st may well lie more in the Second and Third Worlds than in the First? Here are some of the evidences in the early 1990s for this conviction from the New Europe.

- Extraordinary church-planting statistics.
- Creativity and success in evangelism.
- New and revived seminaries.
- Missionary zeal.
- Renewed churches.
- Social and community action projects.
- Thousands of conversions and baptisms.
- New younger , visionary leadership.

These are in evidence right across the Baptist Second World. Evangelism taking place side by side with all kinds of community and social action programmes from homelessness projects through to the care of the victims of war or of environmental catastrophe. If praxis really is the commitment to integrated Christian faith and action, in the light of theological reflection, then there is overwhelming evidence of such praxis throughout contemporary Eastern Europe.

### **Towards a Baptist One World Alliance.**

The significant role being played in all of this praxis, with very limited resources, by the EBF deserves far higher prominence among Baptists in all three Worlds. Since 1949 the EBF has nurtured Christian co-operation among

its member Unions, bringing people and resources together for the good of all. This has been achieved in a territory that stretches from Scotland and Spain in the east to the Pacific shores of Russia in the west. From Scandinavia in the north to Italy in the south. By the time of the 1994 Lillehammer Conference the EBF had grown to embrace 47 Unions, 10,000 churches and some 750,000 members. And the EBF is of course just one major constituency of the broader Baptist World Alliance. Other major areas of the BWA are to be found in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, Central America, the Middle East and South America as well as North America. Please God the BWA will increasingly reflect the vision and experience of Third and Second World Baptist leaders as the 21st century approaches.

The number of baptised members in the Baptist World Alliance is 41 million people, belonging to some 152,239 churches. When to this figure are added the millions of worshippers and children and young people as well as the wider community contacts then the real figure may well be as many as a hundred million people<sup>(10)</sup>. It is not exaggerating to say that the BWA is perhaps uniquely placed in World Christianity to lobby for express and demonstrate the solidarity between the Three Worlds in the global village of the new century and millennium. In the New Europe Baptists are the most prevalent of all Christian denominations. Globally, we are present in more countries across the world than any other Christian tradition including the Roman Catholic Church. This provides us, of course, with major opportunities to demonstrate the truths of Ephesians 2.<sup>(11)</sup> Please God together we will both take and make them.

**Notes:**

- (1) Quoted in 'The New Democracies in Eastern Europe' by Sten Berglund and Jan Åke Dellenbrant (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited 1994). Pg 233.
- (2) *ibid* pg 235. (3) *ibid* see pgs 152-5 for more on the Prague Spring and its aftermath.
- (4) *ibid* pg 195. (5) *ibid* pg 69. (6) *ibid* pg 210.
- (7) The article 'A Second Pentecost' by Brian Cooper appeared in 'Frontier' the magazine of the Keston Institute October/December 1995.
- (8) See the article 'In whose name' in 'Frontier' the magazine of the Keston Institute March/May 1994.
- (9) From the text released after the International Inter-confessional Conference held in St Daniel's monastery, Moscow, June 1994 on 'Christian Faith and Human Enmity'.
- (10) These figures were shared at the 1995 BWA General Council meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina in August 1995. Quoted in 'The Baptist Times' 17/8/95.
- (11) See especially Ephesians 2 : 11-22.

Michael I Bochenski

St Albans

August 1996

*Michael Bochenski is Senior Minister of Dagnall Street Baptist Church, St Albans, Hertfordshire and serves as the European correspondent of the British Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.*

## News from the Executive and Council

The Executive met again in June at Didcot. The first part of the day was spent with some of the BUGB Senior Management Team. As always the mutual respect was real and the discussions lively. Our discussions ranged over the Head of Mission non-appointment, the Word and Spirit networks, the Denominational Consultation and the European scene. Our time together ended with open prayer.



After lunch the Executive met separately and more details of the 1997 Conference were planned. New names for the Council of Reference and Executive were considered. The Word and Spirit meeting at the 1996 Baptist Assembly - at which Rob White had spoken - was reviewed. Despite the lateness of the hour it was clear that many needed personal ministry and were willing to stay up for it. Please God the BUGB Assembly planners will recognise the need for such prayer ministry too. We were also pleased to learn that David Nixon - in his now copious spare time! - had agreed to serve as our honorary auditor.

The Council of Reference met in Sutton Coldfield in July. The whole day was given over to prayer and discussion of the September denominational consultation. Much of the day for us was spent considering interdependency and meaningful Association life, or its absence, in different parts of the country. It would not be right to say more here as we are all conscious of the need to pray that the Risen Lord will be present and will speak to our Union. To anticipate what *He* might say this side of the Summer would not be appropriate!

**Important Notice.** Plans for the Mainstream Human Sexuality Consultation are now finalized. The Consultation will take place at Regent's Park College, Oxford on Tuesday September 17th 10.30am - 6.30pm with Dr David Cook of the Whitfield Institute and Dr Margaret Gill of the Acorn Christian Healing Trust as the keynote speakers. Dr John Weaver will serve as the day's facilitator. The cost for the day will be £15 including lunch and afternoon tea. Timings and details are available on request from Glen Marshall (01924 382966). Glen writes:

'The purpose of the consultation is to respond to the pastoral, ethical and practical challenge presented to the traditional Christian teaching on homosexuality by the growing liberal consensus. This new orthodoxy causes a real dilemma for many in our churches, not least our young people. It is hoped that the day will have a practical focus in that we would like to help develop something of an outline apologetic that can be used to help others seeking to think and respond in a Christian way to this increasingly crucial issue'

**Stop Press:** Carolyn Green (world mission evening) and Heather Evans (youth trak) have also been booked for the 1997 Conference. For full details see the flier with this issue.

*The Editor.*

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**The Mainstream Executive** as at July 1996 are:

*Chair (North):* Glen Marshall, 26 Belle Isle Ave., Wakefield WF1 5JY 01924 382966

*Chair (South):* Rob Warner, Wimbledon Baptist Church, 30 Queens Road,  
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Roger Sutton - Altrincham, Cheshire.

Rob White - Poynton, Cheshire.

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**The Mainstream Council of Reference** as at January 1996 are:

John Brewster - Retford

Ian Coffey - Plymouth

Mike Fuller - Coventry

Jim Graham - Chalfont St Peter

Steven Hembury - Crawley

Steve Ibbotson - Leeds

Vivienne Lasseter - Burnley

John Lewis - Skipton

Ron Overton - Colchester

Roy Searle - Northumbria Community

David Spriggs - Evangelical Alliance

Susan Stevenson - Chatsworth, London.

Jane Thorington-Hassell - Bow, London

John Weaver - Regents', Oxford.

Nigel Wright - Altrincham

Dave Cave - Evangelical Alliance

Andy Cowley - Bushey

Stephen Gaukroger - Chalfont St Peter

Terry Griffith - Bexleyheath

Ian Furlong - Warwick

John James - Penarth

Rupert Lazar - West Croydon

Peter Nodding - Guildford

Michael Quicke - Spurgeon's College

David Slater - Kingsbridge

Roger Standing - West Croydon

Peter Swaffield - Berkhamsted

Derek Tidball - London Bible College

Harry Weatherley - Thatcham

*The Council meets again at Swanwick, Derbyshire on Monday 13th January 1997 .*

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South East (Essex):	Ron Overton	01206 549017
South West:	<i>awaiting leadership.</i>	

*The Executive are always happy to include new names and groupings here. Please let the Editor know of these by the end of November 1996*

(\*) Please note that not all these groups describe themselves as Word and Spirit Networks but *all* share similar aims.

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