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Another Way of Being a Christian in France: A Century of Baptist Implantation

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France is the largest country of Western Europe. Its cultural influence is very ancient and still strong today, in spite of the fact that, since the beginning of the twentieth century, English has gradually replaced French as the language of the world's cultural elite.

In spite of a decline in terms of world impact, France is today the fourth world economic power. Paris, its capital city, has always had worldwide influence. This was even more obvious at the beginning of the nineteenth century, just after the Napoleonic wars and the Revolution of 1789. This privileged position accounts for the fact that France was the first country of continental Europe where Baptists developed, teaching French people another way of being Christian.[1] Rousseau and Lafayette's homeland was a major objective for evangelism. The first French Baptist church appeared as early as 1820. The early years of French Baptist life (1810–32) were characterized by small groups and numbers and a hesitation to forge a specific identity and heterogeneous assemblies. The organized support of British Baptists and even more so of American Baptists brought on a second phase, the time of "pioneer Baptists" in France (1832–70).

This second phase has been shaped by a much more defined identity. This clear identity was shaped both by the presence of American Baptists and by the efficient work of the evangelist and pastor Jean-Baptiste

Cretin. A rationalized policy of expansion financed in most part by Anglo-Saxon Baptists developed during this second phase. The hope born after the French Revolution of 1830 led many in London and Boston to believe that the time had come to establish Baptist and Protestant principles in France. France appeared to be the ideal base for evangelizing the rest of continental Europe. The pioneers of Baptist evangelism in France were however confronted by the harsh reality of life under the Second Empire. Progress was slow and opposition was frequent. In fact, three Baptist meeting places were closed down by decree, and religious meetings were subjected to many restrictions. This context did not keep French Baptist membership and local churches from increasing. Around 1870, they made up a circle of about 2,000 with among them 700 members, baptized by immersion, these having, for the most part, come out of the Roman Catholic Church. Three decades later, French Baptist statistics reached about 6,000, with more than 2,000 baptized members.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in a new era of freedom provided by the Third Republic, many French Baptist leaders like Reuben Saillens or Philemon Vincent thought they would be able to bring almost all French Protestants to adopt the Baptist cause. They thought that freedom and democracy would help them to convince many French people, who were tired of Catholicism and Secularism. If we consider the Baptist impact in France at the end of the twentieth century, those dreams did not come true. In the year 2,000, Baptists are well settled in France, but their numbers remain rather very small (around 12,000 baptized members and about 40,000 followers out of a population of over 60 million). How can we explain such a difference between the initial hopes of growth and the reality of the situation? First, three major cultural struggles inherited from the nineteenth century can help us understand the difficulties of Baptist implantation in France.

The Nineteenth Century's Legacy: Three Major Cultural Struggles

During the nineteenth century, French Baptists existed in a context shaped by three major religious bodies: mainline Protestants (Reformed and Lutheran Churches), the other evangelical Protestant churches (which were quite weak), and the Roman Catholic Church. The Concordat between the state and the official churches (Catholic, Reformed, and

Lutheran churches), promulgated in 1801 and 1802 by Bonaparte, created specific rules. On one hand, the official churches could benefit from public funds. Priests and pastors (Reformed and Lutherans) were paid by the state. On the other hand, the nonofficial churches ("nonrecognized cults") had to find their own resources in a cultural context defiant to religious pluralism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, French Baptists still had to deal with three cultural legacies of this period. The first one is the specific reaction of the mainline Protestant churches.

The Moriscus Complex.—Except for the special case of the Anabaptists,[2] French Protestantism had not developed a tradition of dissenting believers' churches in its early beginning. John H. Rushbrooke regretted it in 1923. He stated: "To its infinite loss, French Protestantism had not the stimulus of a Nonconformity; and, strange to say, it was only after the great Revolution that the renascent churches began to include assemblies of dissenters."[3] This explains why Reformed and Lutheran Churches (supported by the state) were almost the only Protestant partners of French Baptists around 1820 and 1830. When the Baptists began to spread in nineteenth-century France, the exchanges with the national Protestant churches were constant, eventful, and fruitful. Often underestimated by Baptists, the help received from Lutherans and Presbyterians was essential to the success of the movement's origins in France. Relationships with Protestant neighbors were, for the most part, cordial. On the Lutheran and Presbyterian side, Baptists were well thought of and welcomed since Baptists, unlike Methodists for instance, recruited mainly among Catholics and thus were no threat. However, these good relations did not deter a rivalry based on divergent outlooks on Christian history and the Reformation, and certain differing doctrinal and ecclesiological viewpoints, like the main issue of baptism of the convert. The particular history of French Huguenots, marked by a long heritage of persecution, also played its part in the differences between national Protestant churches (those recognized and funded by the state) and Baptists.

In many ways, the Reformed and Lutheran churches developed, at the beginning of Baptist implantation, what could be called a Moriscus Complex. This means that the mainline Protestant churches in France shared the same kind of experience as the Moriscus, those former Muslims who had to adapt to life in a Catholic Spain by restraining their testimony

and any public expression of their inner faith. The Huguenots experienced such a struggle from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. Any public expression of their faith was considered dangerous, and they had learned to dissimulate their specific Christian identity. In such a repressive context, evangelism became nonsense to most of them. When the Baptists came, mainline Protestants had just come out of this difficult period, but they were still shy in terms of evangelism. This has been described by an English Baptist correspondent:

> Their dependence on the state, their fear to displease the authorities, their dread of awakening the jealousy of the Roman Catholics, and many other considerations, made them fearful of taking one aggressive step to attack the kingdom of darkness.[4]

Mainline Protestant churches feared to evangelize in France. However, the above quotation ignored the main reason: a past of hostility, discrimination, and persecution, during which being a Protestant in France meant being martyred or sent to prison for life. The French Baptists, on the contrary, did not share the same historical legacy. They did not have many reasons to fear evangelism. This cultural gap explained, during the nineteenth century and even later, the tensions between mainline Protestant churches and Baptist churches, in spite of good relations. The first ones had lost, in some ways, their evangelistic priority. The second still wanted to evangelize France "without complexes."

The Monopolist Complex.—The second cultural legacy Baptists inherited from the nineteenth century is the strong hostility of the Catholic Church. The relationship with the Catholic giant seems on the whole rather conflicting, especially during the first two thirds of the nineteenth century, a time when the clergy tried with all its power to curtail Baptist initiatives and put a stop to their presence. Catholicism almost had a monopoly on the religious market, and it had great difficulties admitting that religious pluralism and Protestant evangelization should be allowed in contemporary France. Many priests and bishops did their best to hinder Baptist implantation—especially before 1870. They considered Baptist proselytizing as a religious pretense for destabilizing Catholic populations.

Four chapels (Tremel in Brittany, Genlis, Chauny, and Servais in

Picardie) were closed for years because of bishops who wrote to the authorities against the Baptist churches. Many Baptists had difficulties in their jobs because of priests who asked employers to fire them.

At school, at work, sometimes in everyday circumstances, Baptists were discriminated against because of sporadic Catholic intolerance. In response, French Baptists were strongly anti-Catholic. They never missed an opportunity to denounce the "popish" influence on French society. For example, Reuben Saillens, perhaps the most famous French Baptist of all times, thought that Catholicism was a totalitarian system that imprisoned people not only on the religious but also on the political level.[5]

> Catholicism is not merely a system of religion; it is mainly a system of political government; her aim, everywhere, is to enthrone herself in the very soul of the nations, to frame their ideals, their institutions, and their laws, so that the religious and civil organisms should be practically one. In one word, it is theocracy. To speak, therefore, of a modern nation—and of France especially—without speaking of Catholicism, would be almost as impossible as to speak of the Jewish people without mentioning the Jewish religion.[6]

For many Baptists, like Reuben Saillens, the Baptist implantation, based on a form of religion that values the individual choice and the Bible, instead of collective obedience and tradition, represented the opposite of the Catholic culture. In some ways, a sociological approach could lead to the same kind of conclusion. In his polemicist tone, Reuben Saillens stated:

> There is one thing, in this world, of which Rome is afraid, and that is, the individual conscience. Any system, therefore, which tends to annihilate the individual, to absorb him in the mass, to make him a mere cipher incapable of independent action, is a sure ally of Rome. Provided that the people obey her, they will receive from her what imperial Rome already provided, *Panem et circenses.*[7]

No serious historian or sociologist would agree with such a partial view, but the idealtypic opposition (speaking like Max Weber) between a religion of the individual and a religion of the mass helps us to understand

why the Catholic Church feared the Baptists so much. They embodied the exact opposite model of the church. But at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Catholic hierarchy, in spite of a persistent monopolist complex, did try to take into account the lasting character of the newly established Republic and a new context of pluralism. During the twentieth century, relations between Catholics and Baptists became much less tense. The growing secularization of French society brought closer together religious groups that seemed for so long totally irreconcilable. However, the legacy of the Catholic monopolist complex still causes difficulties for Baptists, and for Protestant Evangelicals in general, in a country which has not easily gotten used to religious pluralism.

The Trotskyst Complex.—With the Moriscus Complex suffered by mainline Protestants (the difficulties of evangelization) and the Monopolist Complex suffered by Catholics (difficulties admitting religious pluralism), the Trotskyst Complex is the third cultural legacy inherited by French Baptists at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Trotskyst Complex describes the situation of the frustrated forerunner. It refers to the Trotskysts, a militant minority (still active in France) contesting the mainline interpretation of Marxism by Lenin and Stalin.

Like the Trotskysts, always persuaded of being right and having the truth, the French Baptists have considered themselves as forerunners of the triumph of the truth and of the apostolic model of the church. Like the Trotskysts, French Baptists have been very frustrated to realize that in spite of their value and the conviction of holding the truth, they have remained a tiny minority. This minority position sometimes led to bitterness, extreme individualism,[8] and distrust. This distrust toward other churches (which were accused of partial blindness by the Baptists because they did not rejoin the Baptist team, forerunners of the rehabilitation of the New Testament church) created many problems. Because of this bitterness and distrust, the weak evangelical movement sometimes suffered in France. Some opportunities of common involvement were missed. American Baptists realized that such a complex was a danger. They tried to help French Baptists loose this minority complex and engage in wider involvement with other churches. James Franklin, representing the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in France, emphasized this need after World War I.

> [T]he cause that unites us with the true spiritual descendants of John Calvin and the Huguenots is greater than the differences that separate us. And while remaining loyal to our convictions we can cooperate with those who stand for freedom of conscience, the Lordship of Jesus, and the open Bible. In this connection I recall the words of one of the well-known Baptists in England, whom I heard two weeks ago: "I believe in denominationalism because I believe in the church-universal."[9]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in answer to the Trotskyst Complex of the oppressed and defiant minority, American Baptists wanted to support evangelical cooperation. Many French Baptists already agreed with that view, even if the minority complex still prevented them sometimes from common initiatives.

These cultural legacies—the Moriscus, the Monopolist and the Trotskyst complexes—played their role in the twentieth century, but they were not the only ones. On a larger scale, the reactions to Baptist militancy revealed the permanent features of a national model opposed to religious difference. This model comprised a French cultural messianic identity: the idea that France, the country of the Human Rights Declaration, had a special secular mission to the world. Therefore, every militant religion was considered a threat to this humanist mission.[10]

This model also combined the importance of enduring cultural roots (which were denied to the Baptists) and the fear of being on siege.[11] In spite of many difficult cultural adjustments, French Baptists were settled in the French religious landscape at the beginning of the twentieth century. After a period of growth, they faced a time of stabilization from 1905 to 1945.

From 1905 to 1945: A Time of Stabilization

This time of stabilization started with the year 1905. This could be a paradox. Indeed, 1905 is famous in France as the year of the separation of state and churches. Jean Bauberot has interpreted this separation as the "second threshold of laicization."[12] This threshold, characterized by the "institutional dissociation"[13] of state and religions, meant that the French state refused to legitimize any religion in the public space and affirmed the total freedom of religion. French Baptists believed that such a law would lead to a spectacular evangelical revival. Before 1905, the mainline Protes-

tant churches and the Catholic Church were favored by the state. After that year, all churches were equal in the eyes of the law. The Baptists thought it would help them to win many new converts. In fact, this hope did not come true. The winner was a growing indifference toward Christianity. In spite of this disappointment, the period between 1905 and 1945 was rich in initiatives and accomplishments. It can be divided in two phases. The first one was marked by a major achievement: the construction of a Baptist triad.

The Construction of the French Baptist Triad.—Primarily between the beginning of the twentieth century and 1921, French Baptists created stable structures and lasting institutions. From then on, these structures modeled the history of French Baptists until the end of the present century. This phase, during which the French Baptists of the North joined up with the young Protestant Federation of France (created in 1905), culminated after World War I. Internal tensions, due to a growth that was not entirely mastered and to the diversity of doctrinal positions in the Baptist world, dominated this period. These conflicts involved two men and two Baptist groups—Philemon Vincent and Reuben Saillens.

Vincent represented mainly the northern French Baptists, open to interdenominational cooperation and to a certain degree of doctrinal pluralism. This tendency made possible a more pragmatic evangelization.

Saillens represented mainly the Baptists of the South, more concerned by doctrinal orthodoxy and a strict Baptist line. This tendency, which privileged the "good fight" of doctrinal truth, was open to the Fundamentalist tendency that emerged at the same period in the United States. These tensions concluded after the 1920 and 1921 congresses in a tripartite system: the Federation of Baptist Evangelical Churches of France (F.E.E.B.F), the Evangelical Association of French Language Baptist Churches (A.E.E.B.F), and the Independent Baptist Church of Arthur Blocher (future Church of the Tabernacle).

The first group of churches, mostly strong in the North of France, was led by Philemon Vincent. The Evangelical Association, on the contrary, had its base in the South. It comprised six churches at the beginning, and was led by Robert Dubarry. The last group, a special case, centered around a dynamic church located in Paris and relatively isolated in its certainty of having chosen the only right way: standing firm, alone, for the sake of the

complete and fundamental truth of the Bible, the Word of God. Only the Federation continued to receive financial assistance from Northern Baptists in the USA. However, this assistance stopped after 1932.

This division between French Baptists can be interpreted quite differently. In some ways, it was a disaster. French Baptists had dreamed of a French Baptist Union (which had been formally constituted in 1907). This Union was supposed to be able to coordinate all Baptists efforts. They devoted their energies to this project for several years. The split between these three tendencies (the triad) ruined this hope.

However, the quarrel and rivalry between French Baptists was so deep that a division was certainly the only solution. This division responded to a real demand and corresponded on an international scale to a larger division between pluralistic Baptists and Fundamentalist Baptists. In this specific context, the French division helped Baptists diversify their international networks. Before 1920, the only foreign Baptists who gave strong support to French Baptists were the Northern Baptists of the USA. After 1921, other Baptist structures began to help the French, especially T. T. Shields of Canada and the Bible Union, which developed friendly links with the Baptist Association.

After the Great War, these three groups (Federation, Association, independents) totaled slightly over 6,000 Baptists with 2,000 baptized members. Three decades later, the statistics were almost the same. Between 1905 and 1945, Baptist evangelization in France seemed to have stalled. Was it really the case?

The stagnation of evangelization.—Baptist evangelistic efforts had some of their finest hours at the end of the nineteenth century, with the influential personalities of Francois and Philemon Vincent, Samuel Farelly, Reuben Saillens, and many others. During this period French Baptist work spread into neighboring Belgium and Switzerland. But the Baptists hoped that they would create more than about ten new churches. Edmund Merriam wrote in 1895:

> The present seems to be the time for fruitful and aggressive Baptist labor in France. Faithful, earnest, effective preaching of the pure Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will not be without its fruit. The French people are hesitating between the reaction of Roman Catholicism and the barrenness of

> infidelity, and the conditions for their receiving the pure and holy truths of the Gospel are most favorable.[14]

However, growth paradoxically slowed down and stalled at the beginning of the twentieth century, although the general context of French society seemed much more favorable to the freedom of sharing the gospel. French Baptists did not stop their efforts to convert new people. Baptisms occurred, a few new churches were created (such as the Parisian church of the Rue de Sevres in 1930), and around 1937, the Baptist Federation even created a Home Mission Board.[15]

On a global scale, though, the gains were not stronger than the losses. The Baptist statistics in 1945 did not show any growth when compared to the number of Baptists in 1905.

This standstill in Baptist growth can be explained by four factors. The first factor is external and relates to the progressive secularization of French society. The newly acquired freedom was less profitable than planned to the minority churches. Another external factor related to the impact of two deadly World Wars. These wars distracted the French from religious choices. For most of them, *survival was the only priority.* On the other hand, those wars cost the Baptist churches much, especially World War I. Several Baptist chapels had to be rebuilt or repaired. During World War I, all of the fields but two of the Federation of the northern churches were located in the battle zone. Many of the financial resources were devoted to reconstruction instead of being given to evangelists or missionaries. Two internal tensions of baptism in France added to the explanation: rivalry for power (leading to the creation of the triad, in 1920 and 1921) and costly efforts in organizing. Between 1921 and 1945, the new Baptist structures had to prove their efficiency. Many efforts were made to strengthen those new institutions. They were part of the success of implantation.

Even if in terms of numbers, evangelization stagnated during this period, we can conclude that in terms of quality, Baptist implantation achieved one of its major goals: leading to firm Baptist structures and churches in the middle of the twentieth century. This achievement was combined with an increasing involvement in French society.

A broad involvement in French society.—From the viewpoint of Baptist involvement in the world, the relationship of Baptists with global society

indicated a high profile of interaction with the surrounding world. Several examples of the interaction can be cited. These examples include the deep social and religious influence of the weekly magazine *La Solidarit Sociale* (Social Solidarity) in the twenties and thirties, headed by Philemon Vincent (until his death in 1929) and Robert Farelly; the initiatives of Paul Passy, of the University of Paris (*"Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes"*), a Baptist and an active reformer of phonetics and society; and the work ethic (ethos) of professing believers.

All of this allowed French Baptists to imprint a discreet mark on national life. Many Baptists, especially in the French Federation, were concerned by the social difficulties of their country and were harmed by World War I and the economic crisis of the 1930s. Some of them (Robert Farelly, Henri Vincent, Gaston Brabant) had been directly influenced by the teaching of Walter Rauschenbusch, father of the Social Gospel, during their studies at Rochester Seminary, just before World War I. Like Rauschenbusch and some French Protestants (Charles Gide, Elie Gounelle, Tommy Fallot), they wanted to fight for Christian Socialism. Their approach was defined by Ernst Troeltsch in his *Soziallehren* as a rejection of the "the Pietistic attitude of withdrawal from 'the world' into a sphere of spiritual life and evangelistic effort."[16]

Troeltsch's definition also described the movement as trying to rejoin "the familiar characteristics of the primitive Christian tendency." These characteristics were marked by the belief that churches had to promote a "Christian Revolution," described in biblical terms as "the Kingdom realized on earth."[17]

On a more political level, a few Baptists became mayors in their villages or towns, such as Jules-Nicolas Collobert, first Protestant mayor of Brittany (elected in 1929), or Silas Goulet, mayor of Lievin (North) in the same period. Jean Philema Lemaire, a member of Arthur Blocher's congregation, was also elected deputy in the French National Assembly (1907–14). The Baptist Federation (more active than the Association or the Tabernacle Church in terms of social work) also developed different initiatives, like orphanages or schools during the holidays for poor children of laborers' families. These developments showed that French Baptists were not only preoccupied with numerical growth but also by the social problems of their countrymen.

Finally, the important involvement of Baptists in World War II, as regular soldiers in 1939 and 1940 and later as members of the French Resistance against the Nazi Occupation, showed French society that Baptists definitely identified themselves with the national destiny. That the first Protestant member of the French Resistance to be executed by the Nazis was a Baptist was a good example.[18] This Baptist participation in the fight of World War II can symbolically be considered as the last stage of the cultural implantation of Baptists in France.

Involvement in the world was nonetheless submitted to discussion and differing orientations in which the fundamentalist distinctive came into play. For the French Baptists who defended the fundamentalist approach, social or political activity did not have to be a specific part of the Christian militancy of the local church. They feared that social, "worldly" considerations would weaken the priority of proclaiming a pure gospel. However, even if these churches did not create social institutions (as the Baptist Federation had done), they still had a social impact but in a different (and more discreet) way.[19]

Since 1945, the French Baptist Triad has been confronted by many changes. In a more global world harmed by the Cold War, and affected by a growing secularization especially in Europe, French Baptists had to redefine their priorities. From 1945 to the end of the twentieth century, they experienced a new phase of their history. After a "time of stabilizing," characterized by the end of their institutionalization process and the achievement (at a cultural level) of their implantation, the last half of the twentieth century can be defined as a new phase of growth.

A New Phase of Growth: From World War II to 2000

At the beginning, this new phase of growth was linked to the impact of globalization on Baptist churches. Little by little, the old "Europe of the nations," with its political, religious, and economic frontiers, declined after 1945. The victory of the Allies opened the way to an increasing cooperation between the Western democracies. Borders and distances became less important. This globalization had a direct impact on French Baptist churches.

The impact of globalization on Baptist churches.—French Baptists have been affected in three different ways by the impact of globalization. These

three grounds are an increasing American influence, an intensification of evangelical ecumenism, and the spread of pentecostal and charismatic influence.

The development of American influence after 1945 is probably the most obvious impact of globalization on the French Baptist churches. In spite of General de Gaulle's action with "France Libre," France had been occupied for five years by the Germans. It had been a defeated country. After 1945, faced with the increasing Soviet influence on Eastern Europe, France came under the American umbrella. The United States was the big winner of the war. Through NATO, most western European countries had to host America troops and France was a key country in this arrangement. Many American soldiers (including Baptists) were stationed for years in La Fayette's country before de Gaulle's surprising decision to withdraw from NATO in 1967.

This long-lasting American presence in France had direct influences on the French Baptist churches. The decision of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to support missionaries in France was one of the consequences. Their increasing involvement in France provided the Baptist Federation with considerable help in spite of cultural difficulties. Several new Baptist churches would not have been started in France without the strong support of the SBC.

The impact of Billy Graham is another consequence of globalization. Graham's impact in France started with the initiatives of Jacques Blocher, who had been a former student at Northwestern Seminary in Minneapolis. This dynamic Baptist pastor belonged to the independent Tabernacle Church, but he was convinced that French evangelicals had to "open their windows" to inventive international cooperation. This is why Jacques Blocher supported the beginnings of Youth for Christ. Youth for Christ became the most "notably successful of the new organizations."[20] Just after 1945, Billy Graham was one of the leading figures of this organization. Jacques Blocher was aware of it, and established a first contact with Graham and Torrey Thomson (president of Youth For Christ) at the beginning of 1946. At the end of this year, a direct cooperation began with France, changing some habits and attracting the attention of a new generation of French. Caradoc Jones, Baptist pastor in Paimpol (Brittany), realized it when he discovered that the new type of music used by the Youth

for Christ teams attracted "big crowds."[21]

The first meetings with Billy Graham in 1946 were small. At the first meeting, in the Foyer de Belleville near Paris, around forty people could be counted. This was far from the 200,000 people reached exactly forty years later.[22] But a start was made, and year after year, decade after decade, the presence and help of American evangelists like Graham (who came back in 1955, preaching to 40,000 people in the Vel de Hiv from June 5 to June 9) increased. After 1945, more and more French Baptists realized that they belonged to a far more influential family than the tiny minority they formed in France. They found new opportunities of international cooperation, especially with the United States.

This new sense of cooperation had consequences in terms of evangelical ecumenism. The years after 1945 were a turning point in evangelical cooperation. French Baptists realized more clearly that many other Protestants shared four major points with them.

One common feature was a stress on conversion or "being born again." Whether sudden or gradual, conversion is understood as a radical change of life after a religious experience ("meeting Jesus-Christ").

A second emphasis was on activism. Conversion must develop into a militant life, normally devoted to evangelism, and also (but not always) to social work.

A third characteristic was biblicism. This biblicisim represented "the great respect with which all evangelicals treat the Bible," received and interpreted as the "Word of God."[23]

A fourth characteristic was what the Anglican theologian John Stott called "the centrality of the cross."[24] This "crucicentrism" focuses on the doctrinal theme of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross in an event which happened almost 2,000 years ago and which is considered as the turning-point of human history. As David Bebbington wrote, all "those displaying conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism are evangelicals."[25] Baptists shared these characteristics with Free Churches, Mennonites, Assemblies of God, Brethen, Salvation Army, and others. After 1945, many thought it was time to coordinate the weak evangelical movement in France.

Many initiatives were developed, in spite of a sometimes lingering Trotskyst Complex. Jacques Blocher, from the Tabernacle Church, played a

key role in this process, along with Henri Vincent, from the Baptist Federation, and Andre Thobois, his successor. In the establishment of the European Biblical Institut of Chatou in 1952 (which found a new location in Lamorlaye in 1960), in the re-creation of the French Evangelical Alliance in 1953, the decision to form an Association of Believers' Churches (*Association des eglises de Professants*) in 1957, and the founding of the Free Faculty of Evangelical Theology (*Faculte Libre de Theologie Evangelique*) of Vaux-sur-Seine in November 1965, French Baptists played a very prominent role, mostly with the Free Churches. This development of evangelical ecumenism after 1945 strengthened the Baptists, giving them better confidence and a wider network of activities.

This ecumenical consequence of globalization was combined with new global forms of spirituality. The pentecostal and charismatic movement, with its transnational trends, came to influence many French Baptists after 1945. Pentecostal influence on Baptists can be traced to the 1950s, especially north of France in the Denain Church led by Pastor Jules Thobois. By the 1970s, many Baptist churches, mostly from the Baptist Federation, developed new national and international connections with the charismatic movement. In 1988, charismatic Baptists even created out of the Baptist Federation, a Federation of Charismatic Churches (comprising more than twenty members). This was a proof of a common will to organize, on a national and an international level, the Baptists who shared this kind of global spirituality described by Harvey Cox as the paradigm of Christianity of the Third Millennium. For Harvey Cox, author of *The Secular City,* Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity in general brought back "Fire from Heaven."[26]

Statistical data multiplied by four.—The impact of globalization and the wider networks that Baptists discovered after World War II created new opportunities for evangelism. From 1945 to 2000, the statistical data of the French Baptists quadrupled: from 10,000 members in 1950 (with about 3,000 baptized members) to about 40,000 Baptists in 2000. In 2000, there were 12,000 baptized members, divided between the Baptist association (about 1,500), the Baptist Federation (about 7,000), and the Tabernacle church and the many independents (about 3,500).

In this process, Baptists succeeded in realizing a strong redeployment. In 1950, their situation was precarious because most of the Baptist

churches had developed in small rural towns like in Denain (North), Chauny, or La Fere (Aisne). Their development had been disappointing during the twentieth century because more and more people had moved from rural areas to cities where they had more job opportunities. In such big cities, the Baptists were usually absent, except in Paris and in Lyon.

The Baptists had to adapt to the new urban reality. Between 1945 and 1970, they succeeded in such a shift, and at the end of the twentieth century, almost every large French city had a Baptist church. The American help, along with the new evangelical organizations and charismatic development, gave a strong impulse to a renewed dynamic of evangelism. This impulse was particularly obvious in the North. For example, when the Baptist church of Denain began to hold evangelistic campaigns in the town of Cambrai in 1952, the results came quickly. In 1953 and 1954, more than fifty persons were baptized after professing their faith, and in 1958, with eighty believers, the new Baptist Church of Cambrai was accepted in the Baptist Federation.

The Baptist Federation's statistics are eloquent. They go from eighteen local churches in 1946 to twenty-two churches in 1950, thirty-five in 1960, forty-six in 1970, and more than one hundred in 1995. This numeric growth of local congregations was achieved without neglecting the denominational structures.

After World War II, because of its involvement in the French Protestant Federation,[27] the Baptist Federation generated various ambitious structures, like the Society of Baptist Publications (SPB) organized in 1944 or the Baptist Interior Mission (MIB) whose development was strong. The Baptist Association for Mutual Aid and Youth, created in 1945, developed considerable social work "in the name of Jesus-Christ," including an orphanage, homes for youth or families in trouble, social work centers (around Paris), youth camps, and a home for the aged.

Meanwhile, many new Baptist groups developed all over France during the last half of the twentieth century. Encouraged by Jacques Blocher and the work of the Baptist Association, the Baptist Mid Missions work was started in 1948 in Bordeaux, forming a few years later a Bible Institute (1954). These fundamentalist missionaries "began to open halls in St. Denis, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Dijon," new areas where there were still no Baptists.[28]

At the end of the twentieth century, this work had flourished in spite of divisions and a strict separation from other Baptists (especially the Baptist Federation, considered to be too liberal). Other Baptist groups developed as well: the Evangelical Baptist Mission started in Marseille (south of France) in 1956, a small network of missionary churches around Paris developed by Conservative Baptists in the last third of the century, and numerous small Baptist missions (most of them belonging to a fundamentalist line) started "church planting" efforts. At the beginning of 2000, the French Baptist landscape had been strengthened by many independent Baptist churches who meet in the Evangelical Communion of Independent Baptists, the "*Communion Evangelique de Baptistes Independants.*" They are usually underevaluated because of their separatism.

A remaining fragility.—This quite spectacular development should not be misinterpreted. With about 40,000 French Baptists in 2000, Baptist churches remain a small religious minority. Every part of the "triad" has to deal with struggles that weaken their development.

In the Baptist Federation, the most important problem around 2000 is probably dealing with the very strong internal charismatic tendency. The charismatic movement holds different views of the church and of the role of the pastor—views that do not always fit with the traditional Baptist perspective. What is the best way to coordinate the charismatic and noncharismatic tendencies to strengthen a common Baptist identity? Actually, this is the main challenge of the Baptist Federation.

The weaknesses of the Baptist Association are different. Their challenge is to re-create a real dynamic of evangelism. After its creation, the Association developed a special emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy and deep piety. This distracted the churches somewhat from their first explicit priority, evangelization, which can explain a phase of stagnation from 1945 to 1990. In the last years of the twentieth century, the progressive merger between the Association and the Evangelical Baptist Alliance (*Alliance Baptiste Evangelique de Paris-Est et Nord*) might change this "malthusian culture."

For the independent Baptist churches, the main challenge is organization. Officially, these Baptists refuse any form of supralocal organization, arguing that they do not want to be confronted with an authority coming from anything but the local church. But in refusing this supralocal

authority based on explicit rules—what Paul Harrison calls a "formal system"—independent Baptists have particularly developed the effects of "power" based on implicit rules. This "informal system" is dysfunctional at times.[29] Practically, at the end of the twentieth century, these independent churches have reached a size that might oblige them to create a kind of federation, a "formal system" of supralocal authority. But, will they?

On a larger scale, French Baptists remain weak in cultural terms. France still has difficulties accepting complete religious pluralism, even if the law gives complete freedom to all religions. The religious culture of France remains a Catholic culture, combined with a secular culture that tends to consider religions as remains of the past. The sociologist Jean-Paul Willaime, who teaches history and sociology of Protestantism at the Sorbonne University,[30] describes it as a "Christian and laic (or secular) syncretism" and, more precisely, "laic" and "catholic," which is prevalent in the French national imagery.[31] In such a context, religious militancy (especially if it is not Catholic) is more and more criticized, if the purpose of this militancy is to make new converts.

France remains, however, a country of freedom, and evangelicals in general can pursue their implantation and development. Many close observers of the new French religious situation realize now that religions are not disappearing in modern societies but are reshaping their identities around two notions: the notion of personal pilgrimage and the notion of individual conversion, as the sociologist Daniele Hervieu-Leger described them.[32]

For many reasons, the religious context is more tense than twenty years ago, as if some French cannot accept the fact that religions are not destined to irresistible decline. This specific fear of religious militancy explains partly the French fear of "cults" or "sects," which is particularly intense, compared to other European nations.

A recent law prohibiting "mental manipulation" was even passed by the French Assembly in June 2000. If confirmed by the Senate, such a law could be a strong weapon against militant cults (the so-called Church of Scientology is the main target), but could also be used against militant religions, especially those who are not completely culturally accepted. Protestants, Jews, and even some Catholics fear such a law, which presents a potential threat to religious militancy in contemporary France.

French Baptists certainly have a role in this debate. As Paul Harrison has said about Baptists in modern times, "no Protestant religious group has demonstrated greater tenacity, consistency, and loyalty to its basic emphasis upon individual freedom."[33] But in a country so secularized, will the Baptist voice be heard? Maybe, if this voice is able to unite with many other Protestant and religious bodies.

Conclusion

If we consider what the Baptist hopes were in France around 1900, the twentieth century did not reach the target. Many French Baptists hoped that in a pluralistic society where church and state were at last separated, the Baptist voice would convince many French Christians and many atheists. The result was far more modest than the hope. Compared to the Baptist statistics in many other European countries like Germany, where the Baptist work began more than ten years later than in France, the number of French Baptists at the end of the twentieth century is still very small. Today, Baptists number around 12,000 baptized members and about a group of 40,000 people, which amounts to the population of a small French town.

But in spite of this modest scale, the rapid Baptist growth in the last fifty years confirms a major fact: the relevance of the Baptist model of the church for contemporary society. Professor Jean Delumeau, teacher at the College de France, thinks that what has been too frequently defined as "dechristianization" has been, in fact, the "loss of conformism."[34] In this perspective, the "nonconformist" option of the Baptists has something strong to say in contemporary French society. In a secularized world in which social "integration by conformity is decreasing," and in which "personal convictions" are more and more important, people want to be "actors" of the religious rites and no longer "objects."[35]

In August 1997, the world rally organized in Paris for Catholic youth gave a spectacular confirmation of those evolutions. In the former world meetings of the Catholic youth, the main event was a dialogue between the pope and the youth with prepared questions and a lack of spontaneity. In Paris, Mgr. Lustiger decided to change this. He suggested that the main event could be, for the first time, the baptism of adults. The pope hesitated, but accepted. Eight adults, having personally chosen to receive baptism,

became the center of this "fascinating ceremony," closely observed and analyzed by Daniele Hervieu-Leger.[36]

In some ways, this might be a great symbol of the individual religious aspiration in France at the end of the twentieth century. On the other hand, in a global village in which individuals are confronted by a huge amount of questions and messages, creating stress and anxiety, people also need clear values experienced in friendly communities. "People seek a religion that is capable of miracles and that imparts order and sanity to the human condition," wrote Roger Fink and Rodney Stark, explaining one of the many reasons of the decline of mainline churches.[37] The Baptist view of Christianity, based on strong individual choice, clear Bible-based values and welcoming assemblies (congregationalism), might be able (with many other groups) to answer those needs, displaying to the contemporary seekers "another way of being a Christian in France."

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1. See the title of Sebastien Fath's study, "Resident Aliens? A Sociology and History of Baptist Implantation in France, 1810–1950; Another Way of Being a Christian in France" (Ph.D. diss., Sorbonne, 1998). For a brief and recent overview in English, see Michel Thobois and Albert Wardin Jr., "France (1820)," in Albert Wardin Jr., ed., *Baptists Around the World. A Comprehensive Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 273–76. This contribution comprises a good bibliography.

2. Cf. Jean Seguy, *Les Assemblees Anabaptistes-Mennonites de Frmance* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton), 1977.

3. J. H. Rushbrooke, "France and Neighbouring French-Speaking Lands: A Difficult Field," excerpt from "The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe," dactyl. (4p.), 1.

4. J. H. Rushbrooke, Abstract from a letter, August 11, 1831, *Baptist Magazine* (London: 1831), 384, "Domestic" (about the Baptist Continental Society).

5. Garner Elwyn Hoyt, "The Life and Works of Ruben Saillens" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1964).

6. Reuben Saillens, "Roman Catholicism and Modern France," *The Sword and The Trowel* (June 1901), 268. This article was a paper read at the fourteenth annual Conference of the Pastors' College Evangelical Association, by pastor R. Saillens, of Paris.

7. Ibid., 274–75.

8. See "Baptist Churches in France," *Baptist Quarterly* 14 (October 1951): 185.

9. James H. Franklin, *Foreign Secretary of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, In the Track of the Storm, Report of a Visit to France and Belgium, with Observations Regarding the Needs and Possibilities of Religious Reconstruction in the Regions Devastated by the World War* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, September 1919), 131.

10. In my doctoral thesis, this aspect has been described and detailed as a "prophetic paradigm."

11. These last aspects have been described as the "rooting paradigm" and the "besieged paradigm."

12. The first one being the Concordat of 1801. Jean Bauberot defines it as a stage of "institutional fragmentation" in which the state recognizes a certain degree of religious pluralism and recognizes the public role of religion in terms of moral socialization and education. Jean Bauberot, *La Laicite, quel Heritage? De 1789 a nos Jours* (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1990), 30.

13. Ibid., 75.

14. Edmund Merriam, *Baptist Missions in Europe* (Boston: American Baptist Missionary Union, 1895), 10.

15. Entitled the "Mission Interieure Baptiste." Its first promoter was the pastor Georges Rousseau.

16. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches,* (trans. of the *Soziallehren*) (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Torchbooks, 1960), 2:727.

17. Ibid.

18. He was Andre Gueziec, Baptist from Brittany (born in Morlaix), executed by the Germans May 12, 1941, and declared later "mort pour la France."

19. Ferenc Morton Szasz noticed that Liberal Protestants and Fundamentalists share a concern toward social problems, although they deal with each problem "in its own way." Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880–1933* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 56.

20. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 69.

21. See *Minutes,* Pioneer Mission, January 26, 1940–December 12, 1950, BOX 1; Minutes of the Council Meeting held at 13 Vowler Street, Walworth, Thursday, October, 21, 1950: 144.

22. About 100,000 people were in Bercy Stadium (Paris) during the eight days of preaching (September 20–27, 1986) and 100,000 others assembled during that week in big halls all around France, watching Graham on screen.

23. David W. Bebbington, "British and American Evangelicalism Since 1940," in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyck, *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 366.

24. J. R. Stott, *Fundamentalism and Evangelism* (London: For the Evangelical Alliance by Crusade, 1956), 28, in Mark A. Noll, et. al., *Evangelicalism,* 366.

25. Bebbington, 367.

26. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

27. Two French Baptists played a particularly important role: Andre Thobois (vice president) and Louis Schweitzer (general secretary).

28. Alexander Dechalandeau, "The History of the Baptist Movement in the French-Speaking Countries of Europe" (thesis, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960), 147.

29. Paul M. Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition: A Social Case Study of the American Baptist Convention,* 2d ed. (Carbondale: 1971) 177, 220–222.

30. In the fifth section of the "Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes," specialized on "Religious Sciences."

31. Jean-Paul Willaime, "La Religion Civile a la Francaise et ses Metamorphoses," *Social Compass* 40 (December 1993): 576.

32. Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Le Pelerin et le Converti, La Religion en Mouvement* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

33. F. E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 256; quoted in Harrison, 11.

34. Jean Delumeau, *Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire,* 4th ed. (Paris, PUF, 1992), 318.

35. Dominique Schnapper, *La France de le Integration. Sociologie de la Nation en 1990* (Paris: Gallimard NRF, 1991), 309, 312.

36. Daniele Hervieu Leger, "Regards sur une foi Nomade," interviewed by Dominique Louise Pelegrin, Hors Serie Telerama-L'Actualite Religieuse (1997), 26.

37. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 275. BH&H