

French-Speaking Protestants in Canada

Historical Essays



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BRILL



CHAPTER TWELVE

THE OTHER AMERICAN DREAM: FRENCH BAPTISTS AND CANADA IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES¹

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Introduction

In January 2002, the primary French Baptist magazine published this ‘small theological reflection’:

‘How many Calvinists do you need to change a light bulb? None. Whether there is light or not is predestined by God.

How many Charismatics do you need to change a light bulb? Only one. He always has his arms raised.

How many Anglicans, Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans do you need to change a light bulb? None. They all prefer candles.

How many liberals do you need to change a light bulb? At least ten. First they would need to discuss whether the light bulb really does exist and then if they do come to a conclusion, they wouldn’t want to exclude those who light their rooms in other ways.

How many Baptists do you need to change a light bulb? Did you say ‘change’?²

This story, certainly well worn in Baptist circles around the world, illustrates a typically Baptist trait: reluctance to change. Like their Canadian counterparts, French Baptists like to think that if a 1st Century Christian were to come back to visit their country, he would find himself at home *only* in their churches. Baptists, unlike other Christians, tend to distinguish themselves by their reluctance to change the lights inherited from the 1st first Century. They share the conviction that their local church model closely fits the New Testament model. This reluctance to change is found not only in theological issues, but also when it comes to changing intellectual patterns. Reducing North America to the United States is a French Baptist habit that dies hard. When the

¹ This essay was first presented as ‘The Other American Dream. French Baptists and Canada (19th–20th Centuries),’ *George Rawlyk Annual Lecture*, Acadia University, Nova Scotia, Canada, 9 Mar. 2004.

² ‘Petite réflexion théologique,’ *Construire Ensemble, Paris* 40 (Jan. 2002), 23.



'American dream' is mentioned in France, it always refers to the United States of America and its people. French Baptists have always had a tendency to favor relationships and input from US counterparts³ even if other relationships and networks are also important to them.⁴

Although Baptists are reluctant to change, it is illuminating to examine these other relationships and a multi-pronged approach provides the most accurate picture. We then discover that the 'American dream' dear to many French Baptists extends beyond the American-Canadian border. Canada appeared on the French Baptist horizon as early as the nineteenth century. French-speaking Canadians,⁵ Baptists and their French counterparts have come to share far more than simply language and denominational particularities. We can distinguish three phases in the relationship between French and Canadian Baptists: the nineteenth century, when Canada appeared as a refuge for French Baptists; the period between the First and Second World Wars, during which Canada became a training base; and the period after 1945, when Canadians played a partner role.

Canada as a Place of Refuge (19th Century)

During the first century of Baptist mission work, Canada is seldom mentioned in French sources. The Baptists in France were struggling to survive and to strengthen their mission churches and therefore paid little attention to international developments.

French Baptists until 1875: Difficult Beginnings⁶

Baptist mission work began in a difficult French context. In 1810–1820 a small revival took place in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, in the Northern part of France. At Nomain a sizable congregation of new

³ For an up to date overview of American involvement in Baptist beginnings in Europe, see Ian Randall, 'The Blessings of an Enlightened Christianity: North American Involvement in European Baptist Origins,' *American Baptist Quarterly* 20 (Mar. 2001), 5–26.

⁴ For relations with German Baptists, very active in Eastern France, and with British Baptists: see Sébastien Fath, 'A Forgotten Missionary Link: The Baptist Continental Society in France (1831–1836),' *Baptist Quarterly*, London 40 (Jul. 2003), 133–51.

⁵ A general history is found in Jean-Louis Lalonde, *Des loups dans la bergerie, Les protestants de langue française au Québec 1535–2000* (Montreal: Fides, 2002).

⁶ See Sébastien Fath, *Une autre manière d'être chrétien en France (1810–1950), socio-histoire de l'implantation baptiste* (Geneva: Labor & Fides, 2001), and Sébastien Fath,

Protestants was formed and this developed into a nascent French Baptist movement in 1820,⁷ eighteen years before the formal creation of Acadia Baptist College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. This congregation in Nomain had its own simple chapel as early as 1821. However the North of France was not the sole birthplace of Baptist churches in France. Baptist groups emerged independently in four different locations. Soon after the beginnings in Nomain, similar groups appeared in Brittany, in Alsace and in Paris, amounting to a fourfold Baptist birth in the first half of the 19th Century. After an initial phase (1810–32) characterized by very small groups and numbers, a still hesitant specific identity and heterogeneous assemblies, organized support began from British Baptists and even more so from American Baptists, leading to a second pioneer phase (1832–70).

This second phase is characterized by a much stronger communal identity. The American Baptists insisted on a 'strict' doctrinal basis, upheld by the evangelist and pastor Jean-Baptiste Crétin (1813–93). The general optimism following the 1830 French Revolution led some in London and Boston to believe that the time had come to sow Protestant, and particularly Baptist, principles in France. Didn't France appear as an ideal base from which to evangelize the rest of the continent? The Second Empire, however, presented Baptist pioneers with a brutal awakening: progress was slow, opposition frequent, three Baptist meeting places were closed down by decree, and religious meetings were subjected to many restrictions. Nevertheless, these difficulties did not prevent French Baptists from increasing their membership and the number of local churches. Around 1870, they made up a circle of about 2000 including 700 members baptized by immersion, these having for the most part come out of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Temptation of Taking Refuge

Before 1875, unrecognized religious groups usually met with discrimination. Let us recall the legal framework of the period.

Les baptistes en France (1810–1950), Faits, dates et documents (Cléon d'Andran: Excelsis, 2002).

⁷ As surprising as it may be, France is the first continental country of Europe where Baptist churches developed in the early 19th Century. No wonder that this long history has encouraged French Baptists to focus on their own history and archives, leading to the creation of the French Baptist Historical and Documentary Society (2000). To read more on this Society, see 'Baptist Historical Studies: a Worldwide enterprise,' *American Baptist Historical Society* 22.3 (Sept. 2003), 385–88.

The 19th Century was characterized by the slow assimilation of the principle of religious pluralism in a controlled religious market where the State played a pivotal role. For French Protestants, the situation presented a marked improvement from the 18th Century.⁸ From 1802 to 1905, the French State financed Catholicism, Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism, and also Judaism, to the exclusion of all other denominations. Evangelical Baptist churches developed in a country where religious belonging was linked to geography and where the State had specific pacts with the main recognized religious denominations. This regulation was called the 'Jeu concordataire,' referring to the Concordat, a special law signed between the French State and the Vatican in 1801, which detailed the new public privileges of the Catholic Church (the priests were paid by the State, for example).⁹ It qualified pluralism in France by establishing a separation between recognized religious confessions, the *insiders*, and non-recognized groups, the *outsiders* (often described as dissenters).¹⁰ Like the 'established' and the 'outsiders' studied by Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson in the Winston Parva Community,¹¹ recognized Christians (joined by the Jews in 1808) and unrecognized religious groups rapidly became polarized, affirming their particularities along a strong separation line set by the French State. Baptists found themselves in the non-recognized group and therefore faced sporadic discrimination.

State agents, among them prefects and town mayors, acted with great suspicion toward the initiatives of these rather energetic Protestants called Baptists. After some difficulties in the 1820s and 1830s, we can even observe local persecution in the Aisne department from 1846 to 1848. In the following years, the Second Republic brought a short lived breath of freedom and equality but it was followed by a time of systematic discrimination with a generally harsher tone (though without real persecution). Discrimination gradually ended in the 1860s and 1870s.

All in all, there were several criminal convictions, and several church buildings were closed throughout the period (Genlis, Aisne during the

⁸ See in this volume Robert Larin, 'The French Monarchy and Protestant immigration to Canada before 1760.'

⁹ An extension of this system was later applied to the Reformed and Lutheran Protestants (1802) and to the Jews (1808). The whole is described as the Concordat system.

¹⁰ Fath, *Une autre manière d'être chrétien*, 1043–61.

¹¹ N. Elias and J. L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders* (London: Frank Cass Ltd, 1965).

July Monarchy, Trémel, Côtes du Nord, Chauny and La Fère, Aisne, during the Second Empire). Over a period of sixty years, at least fifteen Baptists were jailed for religious reasons and among them four different pastors (Victor Lepoids, Irénée Foulon, Aimé Cadot, Hector Boileau). We can also add to this list the gendarme Déchy imprisoned for thirty days during the Second Empire and corporal Taquet, jailed for three weeks in 1881. The last case occurred under the Third Republic and represents a late survival of the legislation of the first two thirds of the century. When soldiers on duty were ordered to participate and follow in Catholic processions, this legislation did not enforce respect of freedom of conscience. Twice Baptist military were incarcerated for having refused to kneel in front of the Holy Sacrament at the end of a procession they had been commanded to follow (and this in spite of having requested an exemption). These jailings, that add up to at least fifteen in about sixty years, cannot be seen as a general persecution but they do amount to durable discrimination based on public opinion that was at the time largely rooted in Catholic perception. These difficulties explain why French Baptists turned to the American dream.

United States and Canada, Welcoming Lands

Let us recall that Baptist church perspective is not based on territory (parish) with national Churches as a principle (as is the case in some Protestant churches: Lutheran churches in Scandinavian countries, for instance). The 'typical' Baptist church is a voluntary society of converted believers, wherever they come from. Because of this, Baptist evangelism efforts have no boundaries. French Baptists are not true nationalists even though they can be patriotic. When their feeling of attachment to their country was confronted with practical hindrances in their worship, some did not hesitate to leave for Northern America where a very small Baptist 'Refuge' had begun to develop. It is estimated that roughly 200 to 300 Baptists emigrated across the Atlantic for religious reasons but also for economic motives.

When compared to the large Huguenot emigration in the 17th and 18th Centuries,¹² these figures (200 to 300 Baptists exiled on the American continent) seem insignificant. They also pale in comparison to the

¹² For a short and accurate description of the French exile, see Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, 'Escape From Babylon,' *Christian History*, special issue 'Huguenots and the Wars of Religion,' 20.3 (2001) 38–42.

number of French Anabaptist exiles, defined by Jean Séguy: between 700 and 1000 persons who usually left in family groups.¹³ The emigrants represented roughly 50% of the total Mennonite population in France, and their departure took a heavy toll on the Mennonite presence in that country in the 19th Century. Compared to the global Mennonite population, the proportion of Anabaptist departures was about 50%, which amounted to severe loss and numeric regression of Mennonite presence in France during the 19th Century. The small French Baptist emigration phenomenon is not comparable, but the ratio of emigrants to the total Baptist population, 10% for the period up to 1870, is nonetheless important. It has even led Madeleine Thomas to wonder if the American Baptist Society did not encourage French emigration to the United States.¹⁴

From places as diverse as Picardie, the North, Franche-Comté, from Lyon, Paris, Saint-Etienne, there was a steady stream of departures throughout the 19th Century. In the period from 1870 to 1900, we find many traces in the French Baptist press of this French speaking diaspora in Northern America. Unsurprisingly, the United States is the main destination, but Canada is also mentioned. The pastor and diarist Georges Rousseau (1900–67) writes in the middle of the 20th Century that ‘a large number of French Baptists emigrated to Canada or to the United States under the reigns of Louis-Philippe and Napoléon III in order to worship God freely.’¹⁵ They followed in the footsteps of two Swiss francophones, Henriette Feller¹⁶ and Louis Roussy, who had come to sow the first seeds of Evangelical identity in Quebec as early as 1835.¹⁷ Although we have no source giving the name or the number of the French Baptists settled in Canada, we can surmise that they had a difficult choice to make: English-speaking Canada already had many Baptists, but would require them to learn a new language, while French-speaking Canada had the same Catholic majority that they had left behind in France.

¹³ Jean Séguy, *Les assemblées anabaptistes-mennonites de France* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1977), 372.

¹⁴ Madeleine Thomas, in Jean-Baptiste Pruvot, *Journal d'un pasteur protestant au XIX^e siècle* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1996), 394.

¹⁵ George Rousseau, *Histoire des Eglises baptistes dans le monde* (Paris: SPB, 1951), 123.

¹⁶ On Henriette Feller see essay by Randall and Balmer above.

¹⁷ Mentioned by Stéphane Couture, ‘L’Union d’Eglises baptistes au Canada,’ *Construire Ensemble*, Paris 16 (Sept. 1999), 20.

What is certain is that French speaking Baptist networks were gradually established between the United States and Canada. An article of the *Echo de la Vérité*¹⁸ entitled 'The Franco-American Baptists' and published after a conference of French missionaries in New England (February 6–7, 1893) sheds some light on these East Coast Baptists. It reveals that seventeen missionaries were working in over twenty missionary stations mostly in New England under the oversight of the Reverend J.N. Williams, 'General Missionary of the French Baptist missions of New England.'¹⁹ The missions in question were certainly not churches composed of emigrants from France. In reality, this mission enterprise was aimed at evangelizing French speaking people who had left Quebec and settled in six different American States (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont). The article leaves no ambiguity: 'Their work is aimed at the 500,000 (five hundred thousand) French Canadians established²⁰ in New England, for the most part very catholic and superstitious. The Baptists were the first ones to work with them and other denominations have followed in turn.' The objective was to counter Catholic evangelistic efforts from Quebec, which had led to the creation of several French Canadian Catholic parish churches in New England since 1867.

French Baptist expatriates helped to provide the human resources in this bid to de-catholicize Quebec or at least the Quebec expatriates. As witness to this we have letters from the evangelist Habrial or pastor Revel who shared with Ruben Saillens, his desire to contribute to the 'evangelization of the French.'²¹ To him, this expression meant the 'Franco Americans' of Canadian origin (Québécois). But these Franco-Canadian Baptist links remained very tenuous until after the First World War. Everything changed in the 1920s, with the impact of the fundamentalist crisis on the Baptist ranks.

¹⁸ The main French Baptist periodical of the time.

¹⁹ 'Les baptistes franco-américains,' *L'Écho de la Vérité*, Paris 6 (Mar. 1893), 42–43.

²⁰ François Weil emphasizes that 'between 1840 and 1940, almost one million French Canadians emigrated to the United-States.' F. Weil, *Les franco-américains, 1860–1980* (Paris: Belin, 1989), 9. Since the beginning of the 20th Century, the French word 'franco-américain' or 'Francos' is exclusively used as a description of francophone Canadians from Quebec who emigrated to the United States. See also Mason Wade, *The French-Canadians, 1760–1967* (Toronto: McMillan, 1976).

²¹ Revel, *letter to Ruben Saillens* (Billancourt, 19 Nov. 1902), 3 (Blocher-Saillens Archives).

Canada as a Training Base (T.T. Shields)

By the beginning of the 20th Century, both Canada and the United States had ceased to be considered as lands of refuge for French Baptists. French society now benefited from a stable republican regime hostile to State Catholicism. The increased freedom and democracy in the French society and political situation put an end to all the discrimination that had plagued earlier Baptists, and they no longer had any political or religious reasons for leaving their country. However, this new state of affairs did not preclude North American influence in French Baptist affairs. The faithful financial support²² of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) alone would have ensured this, and Northern America took on a new importance in the context of the fundamentalist crisis.

The French Fundamentalist Crisis and the Northern American Role

The fundamentalist position first affirmed itself mostly in the Northern United States, in opposition to what many Baptists considered a liberal trend. More than the question of inerrancy or premillennialism, the heart of fundamentalist contestation was the fact that some pastors and professors questioned the doctrine of redemption. This North American crisis between liberals and fundamentalists rapidly found echoes in France where it was superimposed on existing conflicts. After having benefited from significant growth at the end of the 19th Century (they tripled their numbers in thirty years) French Baptists had more finances to travel to England or to the United States. They were now connected more closely to their Anglo-Saxon counterparts and were able to take part in their theological debates, and in the twenties, the great debate centered around fundamentalism. Around 1921, after many unfruitful attempts to unite all Baptists in a 'Baptist Union,' the French fundamentalist debate ended with the creation of three different movements: the *Fédération des Eglises Evangéliques Baptistes de France* (FEEBF), the *Association Evangelique des Eglises Evangéliques Baptistes de Langue Française* (AEEBF) and a more independent work which became the Church and Mission of the Tabernacle. At the beginning of the 21st Century these three orientations are still present in France, a sign that they do have a certain social rationale there.

²² This support did not stop before 1932. Since then, all French Baptist churches have been financially self-sufficient.

They also fit with the main fracture lines which reshaped the Baptist movement throughout the world in the first half of the 20th Century. There were three main options: a pluralist option (with more and more explicitly liberal elements), a moderate fundamentalist option (Riley tendency) and a more radical fundamentalist option.

Meeting T.T Shields, The 'Canadian Spurgeon'

Among the three Baptist movements that appear at the beginning of the 1920s, the 'Association Baptiste' (AEEBF) is the one that developed by far the most ties with Canada.²³ At that point, the Association represented half of the French Baptists.²⁴ Its main leader, pastor Robert Dubarry (1875–1970) was eager to find support on the other side of the Atlantic. Indeed, since the Association had refused to support the Baptist Union project it had abruptly lost the financial support of the ABFMS. The Association was therefore in great need of supporters. After having thought of establishing contacts with the Southern Baptist Convention, a still-born initiative,²⁵ Robert Dubarry persevered and developed long lasting contacts with Northern fundamentalists. These came mostly in the *Bible Union* formed in 1923 in Kansas City under the presidency of Thomas Todhunter Shields (1873–1955) who had been pastor at Jarvis Street Baptist Church in Toronto since 1910. An initial trip to Canada in 1924 enabled Dubarry to meet T.T. Shields and Frank Norris (1877–1952), the leaders of the North American fundamentalist movement, as well as the young Dr. J.C. Macaulay, president of the Bible Baptist Union of the State of Ohio. In the future this latter would prove to be one of the faithful supporters of the AEEBF in the United States.

Robert Dubarry had been trained at Spurgeon's College (*Pastors College*) and was immediately impressed by Shields in whom he saw, as many of his contemporaries did, a new Spurgeon. Both men shared the same concern for doctrinal orthodoxy, the same rejection of ecumenical compromise. They had also developed the same amillennial convictions.

²³ During this period, the relations between the *Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec* and the *French Baptist Federation* (FEEBF) were almost inexistent. The mission work in Ivory Coast conducted by the Baptist Tabernacle Church (Paris) was supported for a few months by a female fundamentalist Baptist circle from Canada and the United States. It did not last. Cf. Madeleine Blocher-Saillens, *Par la foi...le triomphe* (Paris: Les Bons Semeurs, 1964 [1st ed. 1938]), 48.

²⁴ The Baptist Association had around 1300 baptized members in 1939 (around 4,000 French attendees, including children).

²⁵ Robert Dubarry, *letter to Dr Franklin* (10 Oct. 1921, Frédéric Bühler Archives).

Lastly, Robert Dubarry, like so many other French Baptists, was uneasy with the United States Evangelicals and Baptists who were seen as overly liberal and who tended to confuse national and evangelical values. In Shields,²⁶ born in England but Canadian and proud of it, Robert Dubarry had the opportunity of discovering another North-American way of being Baptist. Shields, on his part, heartily approved the separatist decision of the Association about which he had written a laudatory article as early as 1923 in the *Watchman*. Interaction between both men was quite positive. However the French Baptist Association, which was called *French Bible Mission* on the other side of the Atlantic, did not immediately establish formal relationships with Canadian Baptist fundamentalists.

Regular Baptist of Canada and the French Baptist Association: a Courtship?

Nicknamed the ‘Canadian Spurgeon’ because of his strong biblical convictions and his remarkable gifts for preaching,²⁷ Shields was not universally appreciated. His personal charisma frightened some and his clear cut convictions repelled many moderate Baptists. But whether we appreciate him or not, it must be recognized that he was a leader able to train men. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most Canadian Baptist students for the ministry trained in two Universities, McMaster in Hamilton and Acadia in Nova Scotia. T.T. Shields felt led to found the *Toronto Baptist Seminary*²⁸ in January 1927. This was a response to what he considered a training monopoly by seminaries with a modernist trend. The first year this seminary found ‘fourteen enrolled full-time students’²⁹ and American fundamentalist W.B. Riley (1861–1947) was a guest speaker. In this same year, T.T. Shields definitively cut off relationships with the Ontario and Quebec Convention.³⁰ In the printed

²⁶ See Lalonde, *Des loups dans la bergerie*, 257.

²⁷ See Lesly K. Tarr’s hagiography, *Shields of Canada* (Grand Rapid, Mi.: Baker Book House, 1967), 150.

²⁸ For a deep analysis of this Canadian conflict, see Paul Wilson, ‘Central Canadian Baptists and the Role of Cultural Factors in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Schism of 1927’, *Baptist History and Heritage* 36 (Winter/Spring 2001), 61–81.

²⁹ Rev J.P. Bodner, ‘1927: The Year of the open Door’, in *By His Grace to His Glory, 60 years of ministry, Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College, 1927–1987* (Toronto: Bryan Press Limited, 1987), 1–26.

³⁰ W.B. Riley, another huge figure of Northern American fundamentalism, made a different choice: he decided to stay in the *Northern Baptist Convention* until 1947, in spite of his increasing critics.

lines of the *Gospel Witness* (the fundamentalist journal directed by T.T. Shields) this seminary was presented as a fortress of evangelical orthodoxy against the waverings of McMaster Faculty (directed by L.H. Marshall in Hamilton, Ontario). Without being able to reverse trends, the seminary was the rallying point of many discontented Canadian Fundamentalist Baptists. This institution developed gradually throughout the thirties in the shadow of the Jarvis Street Baptist Church led by Shields. T.T. Shields (nicknamed 'Big Chief' by those close to him) and Robert Dubarry were led during these years by a similar approach to strengthen the ties between the Regular Baptists of Canada and the AEEBF.

This collaboration and proximity led Doctor Whitcombe, who was at this time a close collaborator of Shields and a teacher at the Toronto Seminary, to ask if it would be possible for Robert Dubarry to send a French student to the Seminary so that he could teach French in exchange for his theological training. The leaders at the Toronto Baptist Seminary intended to develop a project targeted towards Quebec and the francophone parts of Canada,³¹ which they saw as abandoned to 'Romanism' (that is to Catholicism) and to this end they needed good training in French. To meet this objective, Robert Dubarry sent Frédéric Bühler (born in 1914), a young Baptist from the area of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines (Haut-Rhin) who was still hesitant as to the orientation he should take in the future but wanted to get theological training. This young Alsatian 'proved to be a brilliant student and an excellent teacher and upon graduation gave an eminent address as the valedictorian for 1937.³² Before his return to France he went on an extensive deputation trip from the Fall of 1937 to July 1938 visiting many fundamentalist Baptist churches in Canada as well as in the United States on behalf of the *French Bible Mission* (the English name given to the AEEBF). Thanks to his powers of persuasion,

³¹ At the same time the Bonne Nouvelle Mission was created in 1934 (without links with regular Baptists. Its founder, Rev. Henri Lanctin (1892–1986), had the same purpose: reaching the French-speaking Canadians and creating French-speaking Baptist churches. See 'Beloved Founder-Home with the Lord,' *La Bonne Nouvelle* 52 (Spring 1986), 1.

³² W.P. Bauman, chapter 3: 'Alumni serving in the French Language,' in *By His Grace to His Glory*, 60. 'Mr. Buhler made an enviable record, in spite of the handicap under which he came, a then limited knowledge of English. His record has been the best of any in his class, and hence it was his honor to deliver the valedictory.' *The Gospel Witness* (13 May 1937), 6.

the Union of Regular Baptist Churches in Ontario and Quebec decided to offer financial support to the AEEBF, to the great relief of Robert Dubarry.³³

Never before had Canadian Baptists been so involved in the history of French Baptists. Even if they were just a minority of Canadian fundamentalist Baptists, French Baptists saw their help as precious and unique North American support. From then on, several young or future pastors started to dream about Ontario and the great Canadian horizons. After trailblazing the way towards closer relations between Toronto and the Association, Frédéric Bühler was followed by several students from the AEEBF. Among them we find in the 1940s and 1950s, William-Henri Frey (from 1938 to 1940 then 1943 to 1945), Guy Appéré (from 1946 to 1950), Etienne and Doris Huser (1948–52, 1949–52). Even if after Second World War the *Toronto Baptist Seminary* was not quite the same as in the thirties, it remained the main North American reference for the first three decades in the life of the Association. By training five leading pastors for the AEEBF, and by nourishing correspondence and regular exchanges, Toronto Baptist Seminary led by T.T. Shields became to the Association what Rochester Seminary was to the FEEBF in its beginnings: an ‘identity hinterland,’ an external training place with the prestige of a clearly stated theology (the Social Gospel in Rochester, fundamentalism in Toronto).

After the period between the two World Wars, during which Canadian Fundamentalists offered direct support and training to almost half of the French Baptists, Baptist Franco-Canadian relationships took on a new turn.

Canada as a Partner (Since 1950)

After having been a refuge in the 19th Century, and then a training base for the French Baptist Association between the World Wars, Canada played a third role since 1945: a partner role, especially in the case of Quebec.

³³ See the important letter he wrote to the *Board of the Union of Regular Baptist Churches of Ontario and Quebec* on 7 Oct. 1937. He highlighted that the French Bible Union ‘is not only thoroughly Evangelical, but also thoroughly Baptist,’ 1. It had already gained some experience and efficiency, had no deficit, and separated itself from all modernist influences (Bühler Archives).

*Well-Implanted Baptist Churches*³⁴

Around 1950, the Baptists had finished taking root. Baptist churches had developed structures, had extended to the whole country in spite of being a small minority and related better to French society as a whole. They were no longer faced with the threat of extinction. A few years after the Second World War during which they too lost many lives, Baptists represented a group of about 10,000 protestants well-integrated into the social fabric of the nation. The impact of globalization and the wider networks in which Baptists evolved after the Second World War created new opportunities for evangelism. From 1945 to 2000, the French Baptists had increased fourfold: from 10,000 French Baptists around 1950 (with about 3,000 members baptized by immersion), to about 40,000 Baptists around the year 2000 (with 12,000 baptized members, divided between the Baptist Association -about 1,500 strong-, the Baptist Federation -about 7,000- and the Tabernacle church and the many independents -about 3,500-). As they grew, the Baptists also succeeded in redeploying their energies in mission. In 1950, their situation was rather precarious because most of the Baptist churches had developed in small rural towns such as Denain (North), Chauny or La Fère (Aisne). The development of these churches had been disappointing during the 20th Century, because more and more people had moved from rural areas to cities with more job opportunities. In such big cities, the Baptists were usually absent, except in Paris and in Lyon. Baptists had to adapt to the new urban reality. Between 1945 and 1970, they succeeded in such a shift, and at the beginning of the 21st Century, there is a Baptist church in almost every large French city. Several new evangelical missions and para-church organizations, and new French evangelical networks and charismatic development encouraged a renewed dynamic of evangelism. While the ranks of the Baptist Association remained stable, the Baptist Federation's statistics are impressive: they developed from 18 local churches in 1946 to 22 churches in 1950, 35 in 1960, 46 in 1970 and more than 100 in 1995. This numerical growth was accompanied by a corresponding growth in structures: after the Second World War, because of involvement in the French

³⁴ This section is adapted from a part of Sébastien Fath, 'Another Way of Being a Christian in France: A Century of Baptist Implantation,' *Baptist History and Heritage* 34 (Winter/Spring 2001), 153-73.

Protestant Federation,³⁵ the Baptist Federation generated various ambitious structures such as the Society of Baptist Publications (SPB), organized in 1944, and the Baptist Interior Mission (MIB). The *Association Baptiste Pour l'Entraide et la Jeunesse*, 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 (in Compiègne).

Meanwhile, many new Baptist groups developed all over France during the last half of the 20th 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,'³⁶ new areas where there were still no Baptists. At the beginning of the 21st Century, this work has 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, the Conservative Baptists developed a small network of missionary churches around Paris in the last third of the century,³⁷ and numerous small Baptist missions (most of them holding a fundamentalist position) started 'church planting' efforts. At this point, the French Baptist landscape has been strengthened numerically by many independent Baptist churches. Most of them cooperate in the *Communion Évangélique de Baptistes Indépendants*.

Limited, Yet Regular Exchanges

Nevertheless, French Baptist development since 1945 remains limited. To compare with Canadian Baptists remember that all French Evangelicals (about 350,000 individuals) made up 0.5 % of the population in France in 2009.³⁸ Canadian Baptists for their part are about 230,000,

³⁵ In which two French Baptists played a particularly important role: André Thobois (former vice-president) and Louis Schweitzer (former general secretary).

³⁶ Alexander Dechalandeau, 'The History of the Baptist Movement in the French-Speaking Countries of Europe' (Th.D. Thesis, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Chicago, 1960), 147.

³⁷ They gradually merged with the Baptist Association at the beginning of the 21st Century.

³⁸ This rate is similar in Quebec.

even more if we count all the attendees (including children). Furthermore they represent over 3% of the Canadian population, which is much higher than in France. Proportionally there are 6 times as many Baptists in the Canadian population than Evangelicals in the French population. In spite of this disproportion, we can say that the statistical curves are becoming more similar. Whereas the absolute and relative numbers of Baptists in the Canadian population are decreasing,³⁹ it is the opposite in the case of France. This convergence has encouraged regular even if limited exchanges between the two national Baptist movements.

The French Baptist Association continued its partnership with the Regular Baptists after 1950, though on a more minor scale. A few French pastors benefited more recently from training at Jarvis Street, among them Louis Grosrenaud (1960–61), Robert and Lucette Huser, and later Paul Appéré (who is still pastoring the largest Baptist church in inner city Paris).⁴⁰ The Canadian Wilfred Bauman was a key link for the French after 1945. But the decline of the Seminary founded by Shields led the Association to re-orient its exterior relations towards Europe. The Fédération Baptiste, on the other hand, which had practically no relations with Canada prior to 1945, developed consistent relations with its Canadian counterpart, the Canadian Baptist Federation, which became Canadian Baptist Ministries. These two structures share a number of similar traits among which was a great internal diversity and the growing presence of ‘baptiscosts.’⁴¹ Relationships were easier with French speaking Canadians but more difficult when language was a barrier. The French Federation has thus gone further in its contacts

³⁹ The same can be said about Canadian Evangelicals as a whole. The proportion of Evangelicals decreased since the ‘glorious times’ described by George Rawlyk, when Evangelicals were the Canadian religious mainstream. See Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire. Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775–1812* (Kingston/Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

⁴⁰ After World War II, the Toronto Baptist Seminary met a severe decline. In 1948, the seminary’s dean, W. Gordon Brown, separated from T.T. Shields and created the Central Baptist Seminary in Toronto. This departure was partly linked to the issue on Millennium: Shields was amillennialist while Gordon Brown was pre-millennialist (like the majority of Fundamentalists). The Central Baptist Seminary became much more successful than the Toronto Baptist Seminary. A few years later, the departure of a close associate of Shields, W.S. Whitecombe (who also rejoined the Central Baptist Seminary) accelerated the decline, in spite of H.C. Slade’s efforts (Slade was Shield’s successor).

⁴¹ We use the word from Robert Wilson, ‘Patterns of Canadian Baptist Life in the Twentieth Century,’ *Baptist History and Heritage* 36 (Winter/Spring 2001), 58, meaning Baptists having Pentecostal tendencies.

with French speaking Canadians. The French Baptist Federation has established close ties with the *Union d'Églises Baptistes du Canada*⁴² founded in 1969 in a formal francophone partnership. This Union counted eight churches at its beginning, and 28 assemblies thirty years later, benefiting from the evangelical revival which took place in Quebec during the 1970s.⁴³

Its director, Stéphane Couture, was interviewed in 1999 by Etienne Lhermenault, General Secretary of the French Baptist Federation. Couture expected France to send church planters and a professor to Canada.⁴⁴ With Henri Frantz, a recently retired pastor and former president of the French Baptist Federation (from 1993 to 1997), French speaking Canadian Baptists welcomed into their midst a well-respected and prominent French Baptist leader in 2003.⁴⁵ After having already visited Canada in 2000, Henri Frantz has become pastor at the Baptist Church of Saint Constant, near Montreal⁴⁶ in the province of Quebec. If the French came to Canada, the opposite is also true: French local churches welcomed Canadian help during a national evangelism campaign from 14 to 21 October 2001. About thirty Canadian Baptists were involved in this ambitious evangelical outreach. The Baptist Church in Chauny in particular was able to count on the help of Jeanne Djaballah (wife of the director of the *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique* in Montreal) and her daughter as well as Bob Berry (former general secretary of Canadian Baptist International Ministries) and his wife Grace.⁴⁷ About sixteen Canadian Baptists (working with Canadian Baptist Ministries) came back two years later, mostly to Alsace,⁴⁸ invited by four Baptist churches for special activities related to the 'Year of the Bible' (2003).

⁴² For an overview of its beginnings, see Maurice C. Boillat, 'C'est nouveau. The Union of French Baptist Churches in Canada,' in *Baptist Family in Global Village*, ed. Thelma Langley (Saint John, N.B.: Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board, 1972), 81–93. Maurice Boillat (1925–1986) was pastor of La Prairie French Baptist Church. He became the first General Secretary of the Union of French Baptist Churches (from 1969 to 1981). He received a doctorate in Divinity, *honoris causa*, from the University of Acadia (1980).

⁴³ See Richard Loughheed's article above on the Evangelical revival.

⁴⁴ Stéphane Couture, 'L'Union d'Églises Baptistes au Canada,' *Construire Ensemble* 16 (Sept. 1999), 21.

⁴⁵ See Henri Frantz interviewed by Nathalie Guillet, *Construire Ensemble* 56 (Sept. 2003).

⁴⁶ One of the oldest French-speaking Baptist churches of Canada. It covers the south-western part of the Montreal area.

⁴⁷ Among the 90 international volunteers who were involved in this evangelistic outreach, there were also, apart from Canadians, Baptists from United States, Belgium and Malta. Cf. Michel Audo, 'Il tient parole!' *Construire Ensemble* 39 (Dec. 2001), 31.

⁴⁸ I express my gratitude to Rev. David R. Watt (lecturer in Missions and Recruitment Officer) for the first-hand information he gave me on that topic.

On a more global level, Terry Smith, a prominent Canadian Baptist, served as a director of the European Bible Institute of Lamorlaye.⁴⁹ Terry Smith directed this institution for the last twenty years, and benefited from the direct support of Canadian Baptist Ministries for six years. Although the Bible European Institute was closed in 2002 for financial reasons, it will have a lasting impact on hundreds of French Evangelical leaders, including many Baptists.

Finally there were also relationships established between French and Canadian independent fundamentalists during this period. The *Association of Regular Baptist Churches* (ARBC) cultivates specific relationships with missionaries of the *Baptist Mid Missions* in France. Men like John Gasdick and Pierre Lortie traveled and linked the two sides of the Atlantic. During the 1980s several French-speaking students from the province of Quebec crossed the Atlantic to study at the independent Baptist pastoral institute (Algrange). The website of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists International lists two missionaries who were appointed in France: Carole Allard (1987–88) and Mr. and Mrs. Rouvinez (2002–).⁵⁰ Richard Teachout, an American pastor who had been working in France (Baptist Church in Nancy) left in 1985 to pursue a church-planting ministry in Quebec. In the 1990s it was the turn of the French pastor Bertrand Villomé to settle as a pastor in the city of Quebec. While maintaining personal ties with France, he became one of the leaders of the *Association d'Églises Baptistes Évangéliques* in Quebec.

These very diverse types of relations are sometimes based only on personal connections or 'coincidences.' But more often they illustrate the importance of international Baptist networks, through the World Baptist Alliance or specifically French speaking cooperation. On a deeper level, finally, they are rooted in a shared vision.

Points of Convergence

In spite of the important internal diversity of French and Canadian Baptists, it is possible to highlight three strong converging points between both Baptist national cultures. In some ways, they can be compared to

⁴⁹ This institute was originally founded in Chatou in 1952 and then later situated in the Lamorlaye Castle purchased by the *Greater Europe Mission*. During forty years, over a thousand students studied Bible and music there. *Célébrer 40 années de fidélité de Dieu à Lamorlaye* (Lamorlaye: ed. IBE, 2000).

⁵⁰ www.febinternational.ca/Personnel/allard.htm, www.febinternational.ca/Personnel/rouvinez.htm.

the Canadian Bookshop in Paris, in the heart of the Latin Quarter. Though small and rather difficult to find, this bookshop is remarkably rewarding. The appeal is a subtle mix, an intellectual bridge between British and French influences, as David Bebbington discovered during his stay in Paris for a Conference in 2002.⁵¹ To return to the Baptists, let us review some points of contact between the two national cultures.

Refusing to Identify Christianity with a National Messianism

As Mark Noll notes: ‘Canada has always lacked the sort of compelling national mythology that fuels American ideology.’⁵² Unlike many evangelicals and specifically Baptists in the United States, Canadian Baptists do not tend to identify their Christian mission with their national duty. During the war against Iraq in 2003, most of the Baptists in France were quite reticent about what they thought looked like messianic positions defended by the administration of the American President George W. Bush. As early as Fall 2002, the French Federation issued a joint statement with the European Federation⁵³ in opposition to any military operation led without UN support. It reiterated its opposition in a declaration that stipulated: ‘We regret strongly the support given by the *Southern Baptist Convention* to the current policy of its government. War projects do not seem to fit in any way, any kind of ‘just war’ criteria that might be mentioned.’⁵⁴ Like many of their countrymen, Baptists in France were watching the Canadian position during this important crisis. The Canadian refusal of what looked like messianic politics impressed the French all the more because Canada was taking a real risk by disassociating with its closest neighbor’s politics. It is true that not all Baptists, whether in France or in Canada, systematically set themselves against the way the American government dealt with the Iraqi crisis in 2003. But a globally more critical approach can be seen in both places.

A Minority Culture rather than a Mass Culture

The second common trait can be found in their minority position. A famous Canadian journalist, Pierre Berton, wrote in the mid-sixties:

⁵¹ This International Conference on Evangelicals took place in Paris (Iresco and Sorbonne) from 14–16 Mar. 2002. It has been published by Brepols Publishers (Paris, 2004).

⁵² Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity. An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 248.

⁵³ *Oslo Declaration*, 28 Sept. 2002.

⁵⁴ FEEBF’s official statement, 8 Mar. 2003.

‘The Church then must embark on a long and perhaps painful examination of the kind of world in which many who call themselves Christians will not necessarily ‘go to church’ at all—will not even identify themselves with a congregation or a specific denomination.’⁵⁵ This secularized society described by Pierre Berton can be found today in Canada as well as in France. In France and in Quebec it seems even stronger than in English Canada,⁵⁶ but in large proportions it can be said that in both countries Christianity is no longer the dominant culture. And in both cases, Baptists are a small minority among Christians, whereas in the United States Baptist denominations are sometimes so powerful that they have been compared to ‘a State within the State’ (especially the *Southern Baptist Convention*). This minority situation generates two important consequences. The first is a greater sensitivity to cultural and religious diversity, and to the question of how best to reach secularized individuals today. The second consequence is a desire to compensate a minority experience with a global vision of faith and Christian issues. When a Baptist denomination is very strong numerically and enjoys a majority, it can be tempted by self-sufficiency as suggests the recent decision of the SBC to leave the Baptist World Alliance. On the other hand a minority position nurtures need for others and the sense of global interdependence.⁵⁷ This global mindset prevailed in 1980, when the Baptist World Alliance Congress in Toronto adopted a *Declaration of Human Rights*. A quarter of a century later, Baptists in Canada and in France are still on the same wavelength.

A Broad Evangelical Orientation Rather than ‘Fundamentalism’

The last common trait between Baptists in France and in Canada is their choice of a moderate evangelical orientation. This was not at all a given, since a first impression suggests that French and Canadian fundamentalists were the ones to develop the most dynamic exchanges.

⁵⁵ Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew, A Critical Look at the Church in the New Age*, (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), 140.

⁵⁶ In 1990, seventy percent of Americans, 51 percent of Canadians and only 35 percent of Europeans agreed that ‘God is important’ according to the 1990 *World Values Study Data*.

⁵⁷ For France, see for example Michel Charles, ‘Mondialisation: toute la terre, et le monde entier!’ *Construire Ensemble* 47 (Oct. 2002), 10–12. For the Canadian side, see Shirley Bentall who quotes ‘Keeper of the Flame,’ *The Canadian Baptist* (Feb. 1993), ‘the local church still needs to find its wholeness in the larger structure of our life together as Canadians and in the world family.’ *From Sea to Sea. The Canadian Baptist Federation, 1944–1994* (Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1994), 160.

This Franco-Canadian fundamentalist vitality is undeniable, but it can be explained in part by the fact that most of the French speaking Baptists in Canada were more conservative than the average Anglo-Saxon Canadian Baptists.⁵⁸ As French Baptists first turned to French-Speaking Canadians (for obvious linguistic reasons), it is normal to find many fundamentalists among the early contacts. But on a more global perspective, it remains true that a large majority of Baptists in France and in Canada belong to a broad, non-separatist evangelical line, and accept a real degree of internal pluralism. As Seymour Lipset remarked, very few Canadians belong to fundamentalist Protestant denominations or identify themselves as fundamentalists, while as many as a quarter of *all* citizens of the United States do.⁵⁹ In France even if the proportion of fundamentalists among Baptists is slightly higher than in Canada, a clear evangelical mainstream does still stand out. Premillennialism, pro-life activity, inerrancy of Scripture, anti-Catholicism and creationism are not priority issues for Baptists in France. Many other subjects are debated, however, in a culture where debate is central and which allows for diversity and healthy criticism. A saying, quoted by Robert Wilson, declares that ‘Canadians do not vote for things but against things.’⁶⁰ We could say the same about the French, but this trend is not negative by itself, as critics can help to build a more balanced theology or strategy. Without critics, there is ossification, which provides stability but is close to death. The ability to be ‘against’, to criticize, while staying in the same broad denomination, can be a great strength, and a good barrier against populism or dictatorship. A majority of both Canadians and French seem to share such an ‘irenic’ orientation.⁶¹

Conclusion

The example of the Baptists illustrates the fact that despite their minority status the French-speaking Protestants in Canada have never been

⁵⁸ The main reason may be a strong minority reaction to the huge Catholic majority in Quebec.

⁵⁹ Seymour Lipset, *Continental Divide* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁶⁰ Robert Wilson, ‘Patterns of Canadian Baptist Life,’ 28.

⁶¹ For further discussions on ‘irenic Evangelicalism,’ see Samuel Reimer, ‘A more Irenic Evangelicalism? Comparing Evangelicals in Canada and the U.S.,’ in *Revivals, Baptists and George Rawkyk*, ed. Daniel C. Goodwin (Wolfville: Baptist Heritage in Atlantic Canada, vol. 17, 2000), 154–79.

completely isolated. Rather, they have maintained dynamic international networks including one with France. Even if Baptists do not like the word 'change,' this study of Franco-Canadian relations reveals profound transformations, and, indeed, heralds profound future transformations. As the 21st Century opens, what is striking is the relative scarcity of exchanges between the two countries, in spite of a few promising partnerships. Could it be possible that the ghosts of the past, scarred by the harsh fights between English and French are in part responsible for this situation?⁶² But the evolutions observed since 1945 lead towards closer relations and the common points shared by Canadian and French Baptists suggest a potential for development.

⁶² Some French people have never forgotten that Nova Scotia was once French Acadia. About 8000 French-speaking Acadians had to leave during the 'Grand Derangement' which occurred between 1755 and 1762.

