

Throughout the commentary, there are a few independent short studies which provide useful contextual information. For example, 'Pentecôte: L'histoire d'une fête' (71-72) [Pentecost: The history of a festival] and 'D'où vient le nom de "Chrétiens"?' (415-416) [From where did the name 'Christians' come?]. There are also a few simple black and white maps and illustrations at the appropriate point in the text. The numerous footnotes draw not only on a wide range of recent scholarship but also frequently refer to the church fathers and occasionally to Calvin's commentary on Acts. Thus, while not emphasising the history of interpretation as Bovon does in his commentary on Luke's Gospel in this series, Marguerat demonstrates a healthy appreciation for the contributions of earlier Christian writers.

Marguerat is at his best when he discusses the literary features and narrative flow of the text, often highlighting interesting comparisons, contrasts and structures. He is particularly good at suggesting how one pericope relates to those that precede or follow it. His theological reflections are also generally helpful. On the matter of the historical reliability of the narrative, Marguerat is less clear and convincing. His appreciation for the literary aspects of the text appears to lead him to downplay the historical issue. It is not that he is always pointing out faults in the narrative; in fact, he acknowledges the author's care and precision (27). It simply seems that the matter is of no great importance to Marguerat. As an example we might mention his comment on the narrative of the ascension: 'Luc a historicisé le kérygme de l'élévation (invisible) de Jésus pour l'inscrire dans le cours de l'histoire.' (45) ['Luke has historicised the proclamation of the (invisible) raising of Jesus in order to inscribe it in the course of history.']

I can commend this commentary warmly for what it does well: providing a reading of the text that is sensitive to its narrative features and theological significance. I would simply suggest that the reader supplement his or her study with a volume which wrestles with the historical questions more fully and rewardingly. Even with this caveat, I eagerly look forward to the publication of the second volume of this commentary.

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Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe

Ian M. Randall

Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009, xi + 222 pp.,
hb., €15,00, ISBN 978-3-937896-78-6

SUMMARY

This book marks four hundred years of Baptist life and describes its beginnings in Europe. Baptist churches are presented as conviction-driven communities, sharing a common commitment towards Bible reading, discipleship and missionary outlook. They grew against oppression by state and state church, and thus religious freedom is in their 'genes'. Particularly striking is the dominant contribution of lay preachers to their development and growth. For the Baptist leader and pioneer Gerhard Oncken, a church of believers is a church of missionaries. This book's challenge is to revive that idea in our churches today.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses Werk bezeichnet vier Jahrhunderte baptistischer Geschichte und beschreibt ihre Anfänge in Europa. Baptistengemeinden werden als von Überzeugung motivierte Gemeinschaften dargestellt, die eine gemeinsame Hingabe an Bibellese, Jüngerschaft und missionarische Perspektive teilen. Sie sind trotz der Bedrückung durch Staat und Staatskirche gewachsen. Somit findet sich Religionsfreiheit schon in ihren „Genen“. Besonders eindrücklich ist der vorherrschende Beitrag von Laienpredigern zur Entwicklung und zum Wachstum dieser Gemeinden. Für den baptistischen Leiter und Pionier Gerhard Oncken ist eine Kirche von Gläubigen zugleich eine Gemeinde von Missionaren. Die Herausforderung des Buches besteht darin, diesen Gedanken in unseren Gemeinden heute wieder zu beleben.

RESUME

Ce livre, tout en décrivant ses commencements en Europe, recouvre quatre cents ans de l'histoire baptiste. Les Églises baptistes sont présentées comme des communautés de conviction, dont les caractéristiques sont la lecture de la Bible, le « discipulat » et l'esprit missionnaire. Elles ont grandi en dépit de l'oppression de l'État et de l'Église d'État, et par conséquent la liberté religieuse fait partie de leurs « gènes ». Les prédicateurs laïcs ont contribué de manière décisive à leur développement et à leur croissance. Pour le leader et pionnier baptiste, Gerhard Oncken, une Église de croyants est une Église de missionnaires. Le défi de ce livre est de faire renaître cette idée dans nos Églises aujourd'hui.

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In the summer of July 2009, more than a thousand Baptists gathered in Amsterdam to celebrate four hundred years of Baptist life in the city where its heritage began in 1609. This book was launched at that congress. The author, Ian Randall, with his broad knowledge of not only Baptist history but also of many evangelical and renewal movements in Europe, is the right man for the

job. He knows the sources in impressive detail and is able to retell the Baptist story in a way that is inspiring and sometimes surprising. With the title of his book, he shows his affinity with the work of James McClendon, who paints the Baptist vision as a set of convictions. In *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36.2 (2009) Randall published an article in which he discerns five Baptist convictions, which may be paraphrased as communal Bible reading, discipleship, covenanting communities, redemptive communities and missionary communities. It is interesting to see how these convictions played a role in the beginnings of Baptist life in many European countries.

The Baptist vision is connected to and partly inspired by the Anabaptist vision, so Randall starts his story not in 1609 in Amsterdam, but in 1525 in Zürich, the city of Zwingli, where his 'Bible reading disciples' were the first to take a radical stand for a Believers Church and accordingly for Believer's Baptism. The same passion we find with men like John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, who, seeking a 'pure' church, separated from the Church of England and fled to Amsterdam to form a community based on New Testament principles, with 'worship from the heart' and 'watch-care over the brother' whilst 'discerning the mind of Christ as a congregation'. Randall explains that Smyth and Helwys not only looked for a new model of church, but also for a new model of society, one free from oppression by the state and/or the state church. The logic of religious freedom came out of Baptist principles, Randall rightly concludes. They are about a free soul ('soul-competency') in a free church (one without political or ecclesial coercion) in a free state.

It is striking to see that in almost all countries of Europe Baptist beginnings met with resistance and persecution. In many cases, the animosity of (state) churches was worse than that of the worldly authorities. In Russia and Switzerland, children were baptised against the will of their parents. In Denmark Baptists were offered a place of refuge in Frederica, but along with that concession it was decreed that their children had to be baptised as infants. Many Baptists were arrested and imprisoned several times, had to pay high fees or lost their possessions. Yet this never silenced them: In Latvia Eduard Grimm was placed in a solitary cell because of his preaching while in prison. When the chief of police told Gerhard Oncken (Hamburg, Germany) that he would always feel the force of his finger, Oncken boldly replied that he was not so much interested in his finger as in the arm of God: 'So long as that arm moves, you will never silence me.' Like Helwys in England in the 17th century, in many countries Baptists were at the forefront pleading for religious freedom. From the Baltic lands they travelled 600 miles to St. Petersburg to hand a petition to the Tsar. In Germany Julius Köbner wrote his powerful *Manifesto of Free Primitive Christianity to the German People* in 1848, just a few months after the *Communist Manifesto*.

Baptist beginnings in many countries owe a lot to Pietism and other revival movements, to missionary societies of various backgrounds and to the Bible Societies. The main influence, however, came from one man, the German evangelist, pastor and pioneer Johann Gerhard Oncken. I have counted sixteen countries where he was involved through his own preaching, support and advice or by inspiring and sending others. For Oncken a church of believers is also a church of missionaries. It was his motto 'every member a missionary' that stamped his work and his church and many after him until today. Thirty years after he was baptised in the River Elbe with six others and formed a Baptist church, the Hamburg church had over sixty preaching stations, mainly located in places where members of the church lived. It is striking to see the role of the laity in this book; among the pioneer evangelists were shoemakers (Germany, Denmark, Serbia), carpenters (Latvia, Hungary, Vienna), tailors (Lithuania), seamen (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Latvia) and peasants (in Transylvania four of them became known as the 'peasant prophets').

For me, this point provides the most important and challenging lesson of this book. Will we in the twenty-first century be able to release this basic power again and reawaken the conviction that every church of believers is a church of missionaries? Only then will Baptist history feed the future.

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Institution de la Religion Chrétienne

**Jean Calvin (mise en français moderne par
Marie de Védrines et Paul Wells)**

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RÉSUMÉ

L'Institution de la Religion Chrétienne est désormais accessible dans un français contemporain grâce au travail remarquable de modernisation du texte de Calvin par Marie de Védrines et Paul Wells. C'est une occasion exceptionnelle pour le lectorat francophone de découvrir ou redécouvrir Calvin dans le texte afin d'évaluer par soi-même la pensée du réformateur et de bénéficier de sa méthode théologique biblique.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG :

Das Buch *L'Institution de la Religion Chrétienne* [Die Institution der Christlichen Religion] liegt nunmehr in zeitgenössischem Französisch vor dank der beachtlichen Arbeit von Marie de Védrines und Paul Wells zur Modernisierung des Textes von Calvin. Dies ist eine aussergewöhnliche Gelegenheit für die französische Leserschaft, Calvin im Text zu entdecken oder wiederzuentdecken, um sich selbst ein