

THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST BAPTIST PARISHES IN COURLAND

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In the 1860s Courland had become one of the first and the most significant centres of the movement of Baptism in the Russian Empire. The article provides an overview of the Baptist activities in Courland up to 1879, namely, up to the moment they were legally acknowledged. The author also examines the facilitating factors and the obstacles regarding the dissemination of the new religious movement. The author questions, whether the establishment of the first Baptist parishes in Courland can be related to their religious faith, dissatisfaction with their social status or the political protest against the monopoly of the Ev. Lutheran Church in the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire.

Key words: Ev. Lutherans, Baptists, sects, the Baltic Provinces, denominational politics.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays Latvia considers itself a multi-confessional country where there is successful ecumenical cooperation between various Christian parishes, however, the situation has not always been like this. During Tsarist Russia the Orthodox Church enjoyed a privileged position because it was defined by law as the “leading and governing church” of the Empire whose rights deserved special protection. In the Baltic Provinces (Courland,

Livland and Estonia) it was the Ev. Lutheran Church which had enjoyed actual monopoly rights regarding religious matters since the Reformation. In 1918, when the independent Republic of Latvia was founded, the church was separated from the state but it maintained its authority in society. It defended the idea of the Christian ideal and the necessity of upholding moral values, as well as expressing its opinion regarding other current topical matters in society. First and foremost however, the Ev. Lutheran church represented a part of the cultural historical heritage of Latvia.

Although looking from outside it could seem that the three Baltic countries are very similar, this is not the case. Of course, there are certain similarities among them, but there are also many differences. While Latvians and Lithuanians are united by belonging to the same group of Baltic languages, Latvians and Estonians are united by the common historical experience of belonging to the same state structure, namely, the Livonian Confederation or *Terra Mariana*. There are not only differences between the Baltic countries, but within each country as well. For example, there are differences between the cultural historical regions of Latvia, i.e. Livland, Courland, Semigallia (also Semigalia) and Letgallia, formerly Inflanty (in Polish). The last of them, because of its long-term subordination to Rzeczpospolita and later administrative subordination to the Province of Vitebsk, has undergone a different historical development, and its affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church presents the most visible sign of this.

In the Provinces of Courland and Livland most people were Lutherans. The Orthodox Church accounted for the next biggest group of believers and their parishes were formed not only by Russians serving in the Russian army or administration, but also Latvians who left their original parishes in the 1840s and converted. The number of Orthodox believers also increased during the Soviet occupation when a high number of Russian-speaking people came to Latvia from other USSR republics. Due to the above mentioned reasons Latvia is the Baltic country where there is the biggest confessional diversity. This is also the main reason

why “Taizē”, an ecumenical community well known in Western Europe, chose Riga as the venue for its annual New Year meeting in 2016 (this was the first time the meeting had been held in Eastern Europe).

What is the role of the Courland Baptists in this confessional puzzle and why could they present an interesting and important subject for research? How do the historical sources I’ve proposed and analysed fit into the modern discussion about confessional policy in Tsarist Russia?

Nowadays, Baptists are one of the traditional confessions in Latvia and nobody views them as being foreign, exotic or dangerous. However, this attitude took a long time to form. The first Baptists appeared in Courland as early as the middle of the 19th century, meaning Courland was among the first centres of the Baptist movement in the whole Russian Empire. To a great extent, this was due to the geographic location, in particular, the relative closeness to Hamburg and Memel (modern day *Klaipėda*, Lithuania), which were the first Baptist parishes in Prussia. Thus, there was a certain exchange of ideas and people (mainly residents of cities) between these territories. The second most important Baptist centre was located in the former German colonies, in particular in Volhynia, and the third, which was created later (in the 1870s), in St. Petersburg among the most educated and upper class people. The movement became known as Pashkovism and Radstockism.¹

The emergence of new religious movements in society presented a threat to the existing religious institutions of the time. Pastors of the Courland Ev. Lutheran church were particularly harsh against the first Baptists and did everything they could in order to prevent the dissemination of Baptist ideas in the Baltic Provinces by using their authority and monopoly rights. The secular state authorities of the Province of Volhynia did not view the new movement with the same degree of suspicion, their attitude was rather neutral. Initially, this movement did not interfere with the interests of the Orthodox Church because it spread among the German colonists and Lutheran peasants. Therefore,

it was the viewpoint of the Courland Ev. Lutheran church which was decisive in determining whether and when Baptists would be allowed to act freely in the Russian Empire.

Within the context of the history of the Baptist movement, it is often stated that Baptism is a foreign movement for Russia and therefore automatically dangerous (at that time it was disdainfully referred to as the “Baptists sect”), brought to the country by foreign missionaries. This particular fact provided the grounds for turning against foreigners (the ones who had any relations abroad, in particular, with Germany) whenever Russia felt any threat. Thus, the Russian Empire felt threatened in the 1870s when there was a merging of German lands, as it was believed that the German Empire could wish to merge neighboring territories which were close to it in terms of history and culture, like the Baltic Provinces. The fear of Germans residing in the Empire intensified shortly before World War I when there was a hysterical turning against the German colonists who for several generations had been residing in Volhynia and were all viewed as German spies and agents².

Within this context, Courland Baptist parishes are unique because they were not formed only among the German residents. The main part of them consisted of Latvian and Liv peasants and city residents. **In this publication I would like to propose answers to the questions:** What contributed to the spreading of Baptism in this region? Should the popularity of this movement be explained based on political, social or religious causes? What role did the German factor, the Ev. Lutheran Church and the Russian Empire administration play in the matter of the recognition of Baptist parishes?

THE RESEARCH BASIS

Similar to many other new religious movements, the Baptists acted outside the law in the beginning by holding their meetings at private houses or outside away from towns and villages. They had to be as cautious as possible in order not to be caught and

accused of engaging in illegal activities. Therefore, the initial information about the activities of Baptists in Courland mainly consists of external data (data from police officers, Lutheran pastors). The sources created by the Baptists themselves mainly consist of the memories of first hand witnesses but were composed later, i.e. several decades after the events, moreover, access to them is restricted as they are stored in the archives of Baptist parishes or the personal archives of pastors.

Unpublished sources about Baptists are scattered in archives of various countries: the Russian State Historical Archive (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoričeskii arhiv*, abbreviated as the RGIA), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennii arhiv Rossiiskoi Federacii*, abbreviated as the GARF), as well as the State History Archive of the National Archives of Latvia (*Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs*, abbreviated as the LNA LVVA). The first group consists of the documents of the Ev. Lutheran Church: reports of the Russian Ev. Lutheran General Consistory, protocols of the Ev. Lutheran Consistory Synod of Courland, as well as the complaints by the pastors of Lutheran parishes addressed to the Ministry of the Interior regarding the activities of Baptists. The other groups consist of the documents of secular power, namely the reports of the governor of Courland and the documents of the Third Section of His Majesty's Own Chancery or the Secret Police/Gendarmerie.

The annual reports of the Russian Ev. Lutheran General Consistory at the RGIA are available for the years 1864 to 1896.³ These reports are valuable due to the fact that they reveal the opinion and attitude of the General Consistory regarding various changes taking place in society, as well as towards Baptists. Of course, one must take into account that these reports were useful for the General Consistory to emphasize the positive role of the Church, because it ensured order and peace, and encouraged obedience to authority, put simply, the Church was the guarantor of safety and stability in the country.

The Ev. Lutheran Consistory Synods of Courland were also a platform for discussing current problems related to various new

religious movements. Because the protocols of synods entail the entire second half of the 19th century, they provide crucial information about the number of followers of the initially banned religious movements.⁴ The provided information regarding the “harmful impact” of the new Christian movements should be evaluated cautiously. In particular, one must compare it with the data provided in other historical sources. It must be noted that the protocols of synods are valuable also because they reveal the scope of knowledge (awareness) of Lutheran clergymen about certain phenomena. They allow an understanding of the motivation behind the Lutheran clergymen’s actions, while the detailed description of the discussed questions provides an opportunity to become acquainted with the diversity of opinions before a final decision was taken.

The documents of the Department of Religious Affairs of Foreign Confessions of the Ministry of the Interior help trace the activities of Baptists in the entire Russian Empire.⁵ In the course of studying the files one can acquire a rather complete view regarding the opinions that the governors general of the Baltic and Volhynia, as well as of Courland and elsewhere held regarding the possibilities of regulating the Baptism movement. A significant aspect, which must be taken into account when working with these documents, is that mostly their authors were the representatives of authorities, therefore, the new religious movements were evaluated according to the law. The “harmfulness” or “harmlessness” of each individual “sect” was assessed on the basis of each individual official’s knowledge and understanding.

The reports of the Governor of Courland provide a general overview of the province. The governor was interested in the life of Christian parishes mostly as regards the “people’s virtue”, namely, whether there was direct or indirect incitement to hatred against the state authority or whether the representatives of one religious denomination were incited to hatred against the believers belonging to another religious denomination. Changes of denomination without “grounded” reasons were not welcomed either. Due to the restricted amount of documents, reports on the

territory governed by the governor generally only provide information concerning the number of believers per denomination and their breakdown in various cities and districts.⁶

The Third Section of His Majesty's Own Chancery or the Gendarmerie dealt with the political investigation. Its task was to oversee the work of public administration institutions and to follow the processes in political and public life. The reports of gendarmes recorded the overall public mood, politically suspicious persons and their activities, and verified the gossip circulating in public and as well as tracing its origins.⁷

THE RESEARCH FIELD

For a long time the history of Baptists has been a comparatively marginal topic of research. Representatives of other confessions (Lutherans or Orthodox) who had a subjective viewpoint regarding Baptists as ideological opponents from whom the members of their parishes should be protected were the first to describe the Baptist faith. They composed various polemic writings where Baptists were described as undereducated, fanatic people providing too free interpretation of the Holy Writings. However, the Baptist authors emphasized that they were the true witnesses of Christ, true Christians (because they had assumed their belief being adults at their free will and not just via formal rebaptism at childhood) who had been unfairly suffering due to their belief.⁸ Irrespective of numerous persecutions they had remained loyal to their belief, and this they believed attested the correctness and strictness of their belief.

In the Soviet period Baptism was studied one-sidedly, since the results of such studies were often used for ideological purposes. The movement was interpreted merely as a manifestation of social protest aimed at overthrowing the autocracy and standing for the equality of the society. The religious aspect of the movement was neglected or completely ignored. In the framework of the anti-religious propaganda, Baptism was tendentiously described in order to prove its negative impact on youth.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the interest in the history of Russia experienced a boom. Slavic studies became very popular in many Western universities, good knowledge of Russian allowed them to work with the materials of libraries and archives of the Russian Federation. An essential turning point or change of the paradigm in the understanding of the history of Russia was brought by Swiss historian Andreas Kappeler (1943), in his monograph “The Russian Empire: a multiethnic history”, which has been published several times in German, Russian and English.⁹ He proposed looking at Russia not from the position of the center (Moscow and St. Petersburg), but from the bottom or periphery. This viewpoint revealed the country from quite a different perspective, i.e. as a multinational country, as a country where there were many more regional differences than had been deemed until then. Every region has its own historical tradition, a different ethnic and social structure, therefore, implementation of state policy in each of them could differ.

Several studies devoted to the confessional policy of the Russian Empire have also been published during the last two decades. Particularly extensive discussions have emerged regarding the confessional and national policy of the Empire in the so called North West region (Th. R. Weeks¹⁰, D. Staliunas¹¹, N. Dolbilov¹²). Researchers have also examined questions about the relationship between the center and the periphery, the Russian nation as the titular nation of the Empire and Orthodoxy as the leading faith in the Empire and other nations and denominations.

Within the context of the history of Courland Baptists, it is important to first note the studies published in Latvia. The history of Baptism in the Baltic provinces and nowadays in Latvia has mostly been a subject of interest to the Baptists themselves. The authors of the two most important monographs are pastors of Baptist parishes. One of them was Janis Riss (*Jānis Rīss*, 1883–1953), a pastor with a Master’s degree in history, whose work *Latviešu baptistu draudžu izcelšanās un viņu tālākā attīstība. Vēstures materiāli* (The Origins of Latvian Baptist Parishes and their Further Development) was published for the first time in 1913¹³ (the

Baltic Pastoral Institute republished it in 2016¹⁴). The other author was Janis Tervits (*Jānis Tervits*, 1936–2002), the Baptist Bishop Emeritus, whose work *Latvijas baptistu vēsture. Faktu mozaika* (The History of Latvian Baptists. A Mosaic of Facts) was published in 1999.¹⁵

Both works present materials abundant with facts, yet they cannot be regarded as taking a scholarly approach. In the case of J. Tervits, the work completely corresponds to its title – it is a mosaic of facts or a good manual for all those readers who would like to find information about the foundation of certain parishes, their servants, etc., but its major drawback is the overly fragmented structure and the absence of scientific apparatus. The author has mostly used his personal archive, which is not accessible to other researchers. The history of Baptism nowadays is continued by Olegs Jermolajevs (*Oļegs Jermolājevs* (1978))¹⁶, a doctoral researcher of the University of Daugavpils and the pastor of Cēsis (Cēsis) Baptist Parish. Recently Prof. Valdis Teraudkalns (*Valdis Tēraudkalns*) from the Faculty of Theology, University of Latvia has written an article about the self-image of Latvian Baptists.¹⁷

Researchers most often view the history of the Baptist movement in the context of the freedom of conscience. The latest and most essential work which has been written on this topic, is the monograph “The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths. Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia”¹⁸ published in 2014 in Oxford, whose author is Professor Paul W. Werth from the University of Nevada. This work provides an overview of the above mentioned issues and the policy implemented by the state authorities not only in relation to Christian denominations, but also to other religions. Also the work by Heather J. Coleman (associate professor University of Alberta, Canada) “Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905–1929”¹⁹ published in 2005 is important. It reveals the difficulties of formation of Baptist parishes among peasants in the territory of what is now Ukraine and Georgia.

Within the context of my article the publication by P. W. Werth “Schism Once Removed: Sects, State Authority, and

Meanings of Religious Toleration in Imperial Russia”²⁰ published in 2004 is worth discussing. He compares the central government policies of the Empire in three different regions and on three “foreign confessions”²¹: in the Baltic Provinces, in Armenia and in the Kingdom of Poland. By opposing Robert Crews²², who describes relations between the state and the so-called “foreign confessions” in a too simplified way and “construes non-Orthodox religiosity as a refuge from the government’s intrusion”²³, Werth states that “the state’s attitude towards the ‘orthodoxy’ of foreign confessions was more ambivalent than Crews’ account allows, especially when we move beyond the reign of Nicholas I (1825–1855).”²⁴ He concludes that, although the state policy was generally uncertain and inconsistent (actions exhibited uncertainty and inconsistency), still in some cases it was politically beneficial for it to support schisms (i.e. to recognise their right to independent existence) for the purpose of weakening the positions of Ev. Lutherans or Roman Catholics. The state interests could have also been based on pure practical consideration, as it was much easier to control recognised religious movements; by subjecting them to the state laws they were alienated from their religious centres abroad at the same time.

One can agree to most statements expressed by P. W. Werth about the interaction of the state power and the Ev. Lutheran church, however, certain aspects deserve discussing. For example, by describing the thinking of the Ev. Lutheran church, P. W. Werth refers to the publications by the Orthodox Priest Jakob Lindenberg (1840–1898)²⁵. I think that this author should be viewed with criticism because he is not neutral in his discussion when he represents the Orthodox Church. Moreover, J. Lindenberg sees the local residents of the Baltic Provinces merely as passive chess-pieces who can be easily moved as required. In the introduction of his work “Protestant Sects” he writes that “the level of religiousness of Latvians and Estonians is miserably low, they do not have particular religious feeling. Without seeing any escape from this terrible situation, they are prepared to jump on any new teaching which would just allow them to find the truth

in it.”²⁶ This is presented as the main reason why “sects” gain acceptance so fast in the Baltic Provinces. Unfortunately, this too simplified view on Latvian religiousness is widespread in the works of historians up to now. The Reformation has “turned the light on” in the souls of obscurant Catholics and local residents have not become true Christians even after a couple of centuries have passed, therefore they join either the Herrnhuters or the Orthodox or the Baptists.

J. Lindenberg mentions another interesting example: in Haapsalu (Province of Estonia) Lutheran pastors who had not succeeded in stopping the increasing willingness of peasants to convert to the Orthodox Church invited a Baptist preacher to visit them. Their idea was quite simple, i.e. they thought it was better that peasants would join the Baptists and not the Orthodox Church because they would be able to leave the Baptists parish later in a simple way which would not be possible in the case of the Orthodox.²⁷ Although looking from the formal point of view the pastors were right, still it would be hard to imagine the motivation of Baptists for returning to the parish. Baptists were not moderate believers; they criticised the Lutheran church in all aspects (its tolerance towards drinking, insufficient punishing of open sinners, and its close links with the local nobility).

The analysis of the change of attitude of the Ev. Lutheran church as proposed by P. W. Werth is very valuable. He states that the Ev. Lutheran church, which had treated Herrnhuters in a clearly hostile way in the 18th century, upon feeling a threat by the Orthodox Church in the 1860s, changed its attitude to be much more tolerant towards movements previously totally unacceptable to it. It wanted to merge all its forces in order to fight the Orthodox Church, which was viewed as the greater evil. Lutheran pastors had also started appreciating the contribution by the Herrnhuters to the religious life of Latvians. They admitted that believers had started reading the Words of God much more decently, they had abandoned their previous bad habits and had become model believers. Thus, the Ev. Lutheran church was able to change its viewpoint regarding schisms depending on the

political situation.²⁸ It should be noted in this regard that this change of attitude and approximation to schisms could only happen in relation to the movements who maintained formal links to the Lutheran church.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The second half of the 19th century is an important period in the history of the Russian Empire. The preceding repressive regime created by the Tsar Nikolay I (1825–1855), who hoped to protect Russia against the processes ongoing in Europe by means of imposing strict prohibitions, turned out to be inefficient long-term. Following the defeat of Russia in the Crimean War (1853–1856), it was clear that essential reforms were needed in all the areas of state life. These were commenced as soon as the Emperor Alexander II came to power (1855). The scope of these reforms was hard to imagine. They impacted society, the economy, the military, the judicial system and many other areas. Just a few of the most important reforms included the following: cancellation of serfdom, restriction of censorship, permission to form unions, and reform of education, town administration and the court system. The initiated reforms impacted the existing order of society. They provided certain hope for a person or a group to be free to express their own opinion. This situation did not last long, because as early as the 1870s the policies of Alexander II became more cautious, and in the 1880s after his assassination, the next Tsar, Alexander III (1881–1894), resumed the previous, strict policies.

The second half of the 19th century was also a period of great change in the Baltic Provinces. The cancellation of serfdom had taken place there several decades earlier than in the rest of the Empire (in 1816 in the Province of Estonia, in 1817 in the Province of Courland and in 1819 in Vidzeme), however, it was actually implemented only around the 1860s when peasants bought their farms. Along with economic independence, their national spirits rose and the first Latvian intellectuals were born. Finally,

the Latvian peasants had a chance to be more mobile, to change their place of residence, to send their children to higher schools. There was also a certain flexibility in the national policy of religion. For example, in 1865 the parents of mixed marriages where one of the spouses was Orthodox and the other was Lutheran had the possibility to choose whether their child would be baptized as Orthodox or as Lutheran.²⁹ This exceptional condition was only applied in relation to the Baltic Provinces.

THE EMERGENCE OF BAPTISM

The movement of Baptism is one of the new religious denominations which separated from the Ev. Lutheran Church. The Baptists wanted to restore the ideals of the first Christian parishes, emphasizing the free choice of an individual to accept and confirm their faith. The parish in Hamburg founded by Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800–1884) in 1834 is considered to be the first community of Baptism in Europe.³⁰ In Germany, this new religious movement became especially popular in the 1850s. The missionaries started disseminating the ideas of Baptism, establishing local centres in other countries too. In the Russian Empire such centres were located in the Provinces of Courland and Volhynia.

However, initially the new movement lacked centralization, therefore the development of parishes and opinions about certain issues of faith could differ. This gave rise to a situation where not all Baptists had a clear understanding of their doctrine and the accurate name of the movement. When Baptism was introduced in the Russian Empire, the state authorities also had to become acquainted with its theology and to establish their attitude towards this movement.

There are two versions of the origins of Baptism in the territory of Latvia. The first theory states that Baptism originated among those inhabitants of Courland who “were invited (or summoned) by God” and only later they met the preachers of Baptism from elsewhere. The supporters of the second theory are of

the opinion that the disseminators of Baptism were foreign citizens who lived in Liepaja (*Libau*), Riga (*Riga*) and other cities. In both cases the Crimean War (1853–1856) and its consequences are referred to as an important event. In the first case it is stated that because of the decline of the volume of cargo at the port many residents of Liepaja lost their jobs and several families from the city moved temporarily to Memel. In the second case references are provided that the economic situation was better in Liepaja than in Memel after the war and, therefore, several families of craftsmen and workers moved from Prussia to Liepaja.

The first version is represented by Latvian historians of Baptism: the Bishop of the Latvian Baptists and historian Janis Tervits (*Jānis Tervits*, 1936–2002)³¹ and the Priest, Director of Riga Baptists Theological Seminary Janis Riss (*Jānis Rīss*, 1883–1953)³². They both have emphasized the contribution of A. Hamburger, the teacher at Ziras School in Ventspils district, in facilitating the piety of local inhabitants. A. Hamburger worked at Ziras School from 1847 to 1849. Apart from his responsibilities as a teacher, he was also engaged in popularizing the basic values of Christianity among school children and their parents. This community of people in Ziras not only gathered to worship, but also discussed such issues as the necessity of reading the Bible, celebration of Sunday, refraining from alcohol, etc. Among the pupils of A. Hamburger were E. Eglītis (*E. Eglītis*), J. Jankovskis (*J. Jankovskis*), J. Zirnieks (*J. Zirnieks*), as well as parents K. Berzins (*K. Bērziņš*), J. Dravnieks (*J. Dravnieks*) and others, who later became the continuators of work related to Baptism in Latvia.³³

The second version is represented by a German historian of Baptism, Otto Ekelmann³⁴. The supporters of this theory are of the opinion that an important impulse for the dissemination of the movement's ideas was the fact that some members of the German Baptist parish in Memel moved to and settled down in Riga and Liepaja straight after the Crimean War (1853–1856). O. Ekelmann regards these people as pioneers of missionary work, and he relates the origins of all Baptist movements in the territory of Latvia (not only on the Courland coast, but also in

Riga, Jelgava and later in Vidzeme) to the success of the Memel parish mission. Although there is no evidence that these members of the parish would have arrived in Courland with a mission to disseminate the ideas of Baptism among local inhabitants, it is possible that these foreign citizens – the Baptists – did not hide their faith from others and were active in the popularization of Baptist ideas. That was also how they attracted the attention of state authorities.

It seems that both versions have a grain of truth. Among Latvians there were groups of people who wanted to promote piety. However, it is arguable to what extent the members of these pious communities were informed about the basics of Baptism and followed its postulates. A certain role was also played by the fact that several German craftsmen moved from Prussia to Courland who had already become familiar with Baptism and attracted the attention of other Christians with their opinion and active position.

The first official information about the Baptists in Courland appeared around 1858, when a Baptist rope maker (?) Brandman (also spelled like “Brandtman”, “Brantman”. In the archive documents in Russian: “Brandman”) from Memel moved to Grobina (*Grobin*)³⁵. The following year he was joined by some inhabitants of this area. According to the data gathered by the Governor General, there were 14 followers in 1859, most of them foreigners.³⁶ The local state authorities of the Province of Courland turned against the Baptists because they organised secret meetings. The Lutheran pastors tried to return the backsliders “to the lap of the Church”, believing that the dissemination of this movement could be stopped by deporting the key preacher from the country or imprisoning him.³⁷ On 24th November 1860, the Governor of Courland Johann von Brevern (1858–1868) asked permission from the Governor General to deport Brandman from the country in order to prevent further dissemination of the “sect”. Permission was granted and in the beginning of the next year Brandman was forced to leave Courland and return to Prussia.³⁸

In 1861 the General Consistory of Ev. Lutheran Church sent a letter to the Minister of the Interior, where it was noted that the presence of the Memel parish preachers in Courland was not preferable. According to the Baptist tradition, public worship could be led by any member of the parish, therefore a preacher coming from abroad was unnecessary. It was also stated that the Russian government had no grounds for letting the Baptists spread in the Empire, because they violated the law which prohibited enticing the members of other parishes. Besides, it was emphasised that this “sect” was harmful, because according to their preaching one must obey God more than a man. It was feared that this belief would encourage people to disobey state authorities.³⁹

After becoming acquainted with the 1860 annual report submitted by the governor of Courland, J. Brevern, the Minister of the Interior, initiated extensive investigation of the movement with the help of general governor A. Suvorov. In this investigation it was found out that the ideas of Baptism in the districts of Aizpute (*Hasenpoth*) and Ventspils (*Windau*) were actually disseminated by the Prussian preacher Brandman and some accomplices.⁴⁰ In order to prevent further dissemination of the “sect”, in early 1861 Brandman was deported to Prussia.⁴¹ At this stage local pastors and noblemen played the most important role because they saw too much potential for free-thinking and the willingness to organise themselves among Baptists, which they viewed as unnecessary, as well as criticism of church procedures which had existed for centuries.

THE GROWTH OF THE MOVEMENT

The deportation of one person could not prevent Baptism from spreading roots in Courland, because the movement already had many followers. They secretly crossed the border in order to confirm their faith and would be biblically immersed or rebaptized. Initially this was done by land, later by the sea. In 1860 and 1861 three so-called Memel trips were organized, during which

the inhabitants of Courland were rebaptized and accepted into the Memel Baptist parish. The first trip took place on 2nd September 1860 with nine Latvians and two Germans participating in it. A second trip took place on 11th June 1861, when 15 people were rebaptized, and a third trip – on 20th June 1861.⁴² In August 1861, the Memel parish authorized A. Gertner not only to lead the new parish in Courland, but also to baptize and to distribute the communion. On 22nd September 1861 in Ziras, the first biblical immersion or baptism took place in the territory of Latvia.⁴³

Over the following years the number of Baptists continued to grow. In 1861 for example, the number of backsliding parish members of the Ev. Lutheran Church (Baptist followers) in the districts of the province of Courland was the following: Aizpute – 18, Kuldīga – 14, Ventspils – 177 and in cities and towns: Liepāja – 41, Grobina – 4, making a total of 268 believers.⁴⁴ As it was indicated in the 1861 report of the Governor of Courland J. Brevern, the activities of Baptists were secret, it can therefore be assumed that the number of followers was actually much higher.⁴⁵ The data attest that the highest number of Baptists was in Ventspils district. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Ventspils was the earliest founded parish – in 1861.⁴⁶

In May 1860, the Ev. Lutheran Consistory of Courland received a letter from the pastor of Priekule (*Preekuln*) parish, A. Hesselberg, who reported that “sectarians” had appeared in his parish calling themselves “Baptists”. A. Hesselberg reasoned that people wanted to join them due to the fact that they felt politically and economically oppressed. The Baptist preachers welcomed them very warmly and “talk[ed] about a spiritual awakening”. Meetings every Sunday were widely attended (the number is given, namely, around 1000 people)⁴⁷. It was stated that the Baptist preachers were engaged in proselytism. After a successful preacher’s sermon at the Holy Trinity Festival they obtained several hundred followers. They were mostly from other parishes, and only 20 from Priekule. They were baptized at Priekule marsh. “All means used to convince them to wait humbly until they will be recognized have not been productive. I turned to nearly every

member of the parish, but without any results, because they want to adopt Baptism with a nearly Satanic will.”⁴⁸

The pastor of Priekule also noticed that people of moderate means were among those who joined Baptism. He noted that the Baptists did not succeed in inhabiting the branch of Priekule in Asieten or Bagge Assieten, “because there was greater order and wealth”⁴⁹. The saddest fact was that all these meetings were organized during times of Lutheran public worship, making it disturbing for those members of his tiny parish who had not surrendered to the temptation of Baptism.

According to the statistical data of 1863⁵⁰, it can be seen that there were 685 Baptists in the Province of Courland. In comparison to 1862, their number had increased by 315 people. In 1865 the number of Baptists reached 722⁵¹, and by 1867 the number of Baptists had already reached 1320.⁵²

BAPTISM AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL PROTEST

Although in the literature on the history of Baptism the greatest emphasis is put on the peasants’ inner quest for truth, some events occurring in the beginning of the Baptist movement in its core centres should be mentioned. In the 1860s, the protest movement of peasants erupted, especially in Courland. The peasants were not satisfied with agrarian circumstances and wanted to have their own land plots.⁵³ Up to the 1860s, there would not be a single peasant in Courland who owned land, despite the fact that pursuant to the 1817 law they were given rights to obtain real estate. At the time, when land was being sold to the peasants in the other two Baltic Provinces, Courland was the only province in the entire Empire where only the noblemen were considered landowners. Therefore, in 1863 the noblemen of Courland were forced to resign their monopoly rights to the land (to avoid the government interfering). They achieved the right to ask the highest possible price for their land, meaning the terms and conditions for the contracts of sale elaborated by the noblemen

in Courland, especially in private manors, were among the most difficult in the Russian Empire.⁵⁴

In the 1860s, the peasant households were destroyed, as attested by the report prepared by the Governor of Courland to the Ministry of the Interior: “[...] if the number of buildings in the private and knighthood manors, as well as those in the cities and belonging judges and pastors in Courland was 13,943 in 1861, then in 1865 it was 12,508.”⁵⁵ As indicated by the historian of agrarian issues Austra Mierina (*Austra Mieriņa*), several emigration waves of peasants also attest to the fact that they were not satisfied with the land situation. The most extensive emigration can be dated to 1864/1865. The emigration movement had two core centres – in Ilukste (*Illuxt*) and Ventspils districts, however it also took place in other districts. The peasants migrated mostly to two destinations – the Kingdom of Poland and the Province of Novgorod. In spring 1865, around 3000 people had fled from 6 districts of Courland. From those, nearly two thirds were peasants from Ventspils district, whereas in 1867 peasants from the districts of Grobina and Aizpute started to migrate to the Province of Kaunas. The emigration was based on the rumour that the land at these destinations was given at reduced tariffs, nearly for free.⁵⁶ In such a socially and economically unstable situation, when the dissatisfaction of peasants regarding the arbitrariness of noblemen grew, the preachers of a new movement who offered a certain alternative to the unity of the state and the Church could be received rather responsively.

THE KEY OBJECTIONS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

In 1864, the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Courland prepared a short brochure in Latvian.⁵⁷ It detailed the history of Baptism, as well as the characteristic features of its doctrine. The brochure was intended for the members of Lutheran parishes. In the introduction it was noted that many Baptists still did not know the postulates of their faith, since “they pick up [their ideas] in darkness

and in their hazy enthusiasm they think that they have found the path of blessing”⁵⁸.

The author of this work introduced the readership to those branches of Christianity mentioned by John Wyclif/Wicliffe (1324–1384) and Thomas Münzer (1490–1525)⁵⁹ which had expressed ideas about the equality of people and were against the christening of children before Baptism. The attitude towards these branches of Christianity was rather unmistakable – they did not accept baptism of children, they resigned the positions of priests, they were against any interventions by the state in the Church’s affairs, and they “so to speak, wanted to break all the tops and lift out all the roots from the ground, to achieve equality in all aspects of life, as it should be in the Kingdom of Heaven”⁶⁰. These “half-mad rebaptized [followers of Baptism]”⁶¹ could be blamed for “public disorder and murders”⁶². It was also noted that Baptists lacked consistency: in some places they were forbidden to swear an oath, to be recruited into an army and to take positions at courts. In addition, “they expelled an obvious sinner from the parish without any mercy, whereas in other places they tolerated the faults of their parish members”⁶³. Finally, the author of the brochure concludes that “in the Baptist parishes there are as many pious and honest people as in many others, and they could be gladly treated as brothers. Yet, there are also as many sulky, arrogant and sinful people among their audiences as in any other. Besides, they expel anybody who is not hiding their sins”⁶⁴. However, as stated by the author, among the Baptists there were also many members, who “pick up [their ideas] in darkness and bring great trouble in some places”⁶⁵. It was hardly believable that any harmony and peace could be reached with such people if they pretended that they were “missionaries among the Pagans, and would not stop with their coax and deceitful actions, hiding behind the name of God [and saying] that one must listen to God more than to people”⁶⁶.

It is not known how widely this brochure was distributed, however, it is clear that it could have definitely been read aloud from the pulpit during sermons. It has to be admitted that dis-

semination of various rumours was a usual phenomenon in the society of that period, moreover, the more actively they were denied by the local Lutheran pastor, the more suspicious it seemed. This even caused a contrary effect, as happened in the 1890s in the settlements inhabited by Latvians and Livs, when many Lutherans wanted to change to the Orthodox Church because they believed rumours that noblemen had hidden from them the fact that those who changed to the Orthodox Church would be able to get land either free or with relieved conditions. The persuasive abilities and activities of the Baptists everywhere where they were active could present a serious threat to the Lutheran parishes. In the first half of the 20th century it is possible to find warnings in publications of periodicals of all the confessions or in special annexes stating that Baptists are actually “wolves in sheep’s clothing (in sheep’s skin)” whose teaching may seem enticing at first glance, but is still harmful to one’s soul and misleading.

An official of the Gendarmerie of Courland, when visiting Liepaja in 1865, had gathered information about the activities of Baptists. He reported to the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty’s Own Chancery that “the sectarians gathered for meetings in secret, their public worships were not properly organized, the representatives were chosen by the community, and they were uneducated people”⁶⁷. The followers of Baptists were mostly peasants who translated the Holy Scripture “at ease” and who strictly disclaimed the dogmas of the Lutheran Church. Since they felt enormous hatred against the Lutheran Church and its clergy, the Lutheran pastors had to go through extreme hardship in order to find out the postulates of the Baptists’ doctrine. The key postulate of Baptists determined that an individual had to be baptized when he/she reached adult age (when they could be aware of baptism) and only on those occasions when the “Holy Spirit had addressed” them and they had felt the necessity for this Sacrament.⁶⁸

In the early 1860s Baptists were viewed as a threat to the Lutheran parishes because their followers did not attend the Church anymore and instead gathered in the backyards of ordinary

peasant houses to hold their public worships. The Name of God was preached by people without a theological education. Such a tendency could bother not only the Lutheran pastors, but also the state authorities, because an educated priest was accredited and tested by the consistory both in terms of his theological knowledge and his faithfulness to the state authorities, thus he was legitimate and his actions could be foreseen. However, the first preachers of Baptism were mostly foreign citizens and therefore could not be considered as trustworthy to Russia. They could preach only in secret and as a result their gatherings often took place at night and in completely unsuitable places, for example, in a forest. This meant the police could not follow their actions.

The Dean of Grobina Emil von Launitz (Dean of Grobina from 1850 to 1882) was the most passionate opponent of Baptists in Courland in the second half of the 19th century. In late 1865 he sent a letter to the governor of Courland the Minister of the Interior also read this letter) where he scrupulously described all the harm and evil that he and the priests subordinated to him saw in Baptism. “The Baptists dare to accuse the Church in the rudest way imaginable. They call the Church the house of Satan (*dom djavola*) and the priests – the priests of Satan. They act with no fear against the instructions of the police. The fact that the police calls them to justice is not productive in any way and it only facilitates further dissemination of Baptism, because they don’t worry about violations of law or punishment, they only look for some martyrdom”⁶⁹. The Dean of Grobina von Launic was of the opinion that this movement “brought and supported from abroad” gave rise to several forms of harm. First of all, the children of Baptists were not baptized and their names were not written in the book of the Church. Thus, if there was a need for new recruits, it would be difficult to determine their age. Second, the marriages of Baptists were not lawful, therefore children born in such marriages would be considered as illegitimate, which could cause problems in relation to questions of heritage. Third, persons who arbitrarily had taken the positions of preachers or teachers were not tested in any manner to check their suitability

for the post. Likewise, there was no information about their moral virtues which could guarantee to the government that no harmful and destructive theories endangering “public order and peace”⁷⁰ were disseminated among rural citizens.

However, the main emphasis by the Dean of Grobina lay in the fact that to a certain degree Baptism was a political movement, because Baptists expanded their activities in all those places where rural citizens were dissatisfied with their current situation. This is what happened in Virga (*Wirgen*) and Turlava (*Turlau*). “In those places where citizens were struggling, Baptists arrived and presented their condolences regarding the suffering of innocent people, in an attempt to gain their trust and goodwill. Whenever they had an opportunity, they preached that people should listen to God more than to authorities. It was also certain proof that they only intended to be compliant with law insofar as they agreed to its content.”⁷¹

In 1866, the Ev. Lutheran Consistory of Courland stated that “the Baptists with their unlawful actions had not brought only harm. This harm, as it seemed previously, had to some extent only helped [to ensure that] the life of Church was revived, the inner need had forced the preachers and parishes to study the Word of God more properly”⁷². Yet, it was also noted that “along with the Baptists, people were losing the habit of following the order of law. Since the time, when in 1865 the general governor of the Baltics issued a ban preventing the police from using force against the Baptists, people had been of the opinion that as soon as they became Baptists, they could do all the things that others were prohibited to.”⁷³

Maintaining the existing order, of course, was one of the key tasks of the upper classes and clergy, therefore it is possible that their verdict of the Baptists as a cover for all the unlawful actions of peasants is exaggerated, however, the unsolved legal status of Baptists forced them to act outside the law.

Even in the 1870s, the Ev. Lutheran Church was of the opinion that Baptism could eventually die out. In 1871 the General Consistory noted that “Baptism had led Lutherans to a better

understanding of the Word of God and attachment to the Church. Because Baptism was nothing new, the movement had started weakening. Conversion to Baptism was scarce. [...] many followers of Baptism were returning.”⁷⁴ In 1872, the Consistory was of the opinion that the number of Baptists in many places was decreasing.⁷⁵

Judging only from the reports of the Ev. Lutheran General Consistory, the greatest increase of Baptists could be observed until 1879, namely, while their actions were not legitimized in the Empire. It was considered that the followers of these parishes were moved by the ardour and passion that the Baptists showed while suffering all kinds of punitive measures from the local authorities. For example, in the 1879 report it was noted that “the number of Baptists was not increasing from the moment the government legitimized them. The movement had become weaker”⁷⁶. Also, in the reports of the following years (1881⁷⁷, 1882⁷⁸, 1883⁷⁹, 1884⁸⁰) it was mentioned that Baptism was not as successful as it used to be. In 1883 it was stated that in the districts of Kuldīga and Grobiņa there were cases when the Baptists expressed their wish to return to the Lutheran parishes.⁸¹

It is possible that after 1879 the Ev. Lutheran Church in Courland felt safer than before, because the activities of Baptists were regulated by law. Their parishes were led by preachers who had been approved by the authorities of the province and they were not “accidental” anymore. The Church also started to realize that the members of its parishes were not so much jeopardized by some religious movement as the ever-increasing lack of faith among the people. Already in 1871, the first complaints emerged. According to the report provided by the consistory of Courland: “Performance of external rituals is better in Latvian than in German parishes. It can be explained with the power of habit, which is also beneficial and fruitful. However, the parishes are different. There is silence and peace in rural parishes during the public worship. Also, the private worships must be positively valued. Unfortunately, in many places indifference towards the Word of God and materialism have emerged. Overstepping the

limits of sacredness, drinking and filthiness increases. It is also facilitated by the cohabitation of the bride and groom before marriage. The number of crimes related to the freedom of choice in terms of the place of residence, weakness of the local municipality and total lack of local supervising and control is also growing.”⁸²

There are no grounds for defining Baptism in the late 19th century as declining, since the data reveal the opposite: there were only 3 Baptist parishes up to 1875⁸³, while in the time period from 1876 to 1890, 26 new parishes emerged in the territory of Latvia.⁸⁴ It must be noted that the Lutheran General Consistory pointed out in an 1888 report that the Baptists had built new churches in Jekabpils (*Jacobstadt*), Jaunjelgava (*Friedrichstadt*), Saldus (*Frauenburg*) and Talsi (*Talsen*); however, in these places the new churches did not result in an increase in the number of their followers.⁸⁵

The activities of the Baptist parishes in Courland and the increase of their number were positively affected by the connections with Prussia, later Germany, and different Baptist organizations abroad. J. Tervits has noted that in the 1860s–1870s the Baptists residing in the territory of Courland and Livland received not only moral and legal assistance from German parishes, but also material support. In May 1868, German Baptists sent cash benefit in the amount of 80 roubles to their Latvian brothers in faith. Due to crop failure in the same year, Memel parish granted a large sum of money to the Baptists. In further years, too, German Baptists provided material support on several occasions.⁸⁶

THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF BAPTIST PARISHES

The numerous mutual disagreements and conflicts must be mentioned as an unfavourable factor for the development of Baptist parishes. Often these clashes resulted in the exclusion of ideological opponents and the redistribution of the parish assets. The most harmful effect of these conflicts was suffered by Riga

Sakuma parish (*sākums* – a “beginning” in Latvian), which “had a lot of grief not only due to [the actions of] the former pastor J. Rumbergs, but also the new pastor E. Vasmanis, whose ill-judged decisions in financial matters led to the circumstances that Riga Sakuma parish lost its church and in 1887–1888 the parish split, by 1890 it ceased to exist”⁸⁷. A similar situation could be observed in Ventspils, where a group which in 1887 had organized Ventspils Otrā (*otrā* – “the second” in Latvian) or Janis parish, separated from Ventspils parish. The chaos in the union of parishes was taken advantage of by the members of Velda parish, some of them organizing independent parishes in Bata and Ulmale. Conflicts and separations were also taking place in Jelgava, Saka and other parishes.⁸⁸

Although the Baptist metrical records were documented by the local police, the data are not included in the official statistics. Therefore, the actual increase of the number of Baptists can be only established by using certain historical sources (see Table 1 below). The total number of Baptists in the Province of Courland in 1878 was 3632. The greatest number was in the district of Ventspils (997) and in the city of Ventspils (430). The second biggest centre of Baptists was Liepaja with 230 followers.

Table 1

INFORMATION ON THE NUMBER OF BAPTISTS IN THE
PROVINCE OF COURLAND IN 187889

Districts	Bauska	Dobele	Ventspils	Kuldīga	Aizpute	Grobina
Adults	7	19	618	204	516	636
Children	1	15	379	45	145	257
Total	8	34	997	249	661	893

Town	Bauska	Ventspils	Kuldīga	Piltene	Aizpute	Grobina	Liepaja
Adults	7	265	18	8	48	4	183
Children	9	165	8	5	18	5	47
Total	16	430	26	13	66	9	230

In order for the pastors of Lutheran parishes to have accurate information about those who had decided to join the Baptists, the Governor of Courland published a circular in 1893, according to which the converts had to receive a special notice from the Lutheran pastor saying that he had been informed about their withdrawal from the parish before rebaptism.⁹⁰ Of course, it was an opportunity to persuade the respective member of the parish not to leave the Lutheran Church. Even in 1899 the Baptist preachers wrote complaints to the administration of the province regarding the Lutheran pastors being late with their references.⁹¹ The Ev. Lutheran Consistory of Courland on the other hand, when referring to the complaints of priests, tried to bring criminal charges in local courts against those Baptist preachers who had rebaptized Lutherans without the respective notice. As it can be seen from the correspondence between the interested parties when the preacher of Grobina was accused, the authorities of the province, being aware of the mutual dislike between both religious groups, did not hurry to side with the Lutherans. They noted that the priests had to acknowledge that on many occasions⁹² their rejections corresponded to the letter and not to the spirit of the law.⁹³

In general, the number of members of Baptist parishes in the 1890s was stable. It is crucial that the increase of the believers following this movement did not happen “automatically” as it could be observed with some other religious denominations, because the members of Baptist parishes were requested to confirm their faith when they were old enough to realise it. They were also requested to give up various habits, for example, using alcohol, being only partially devoted to faith issues, adultery, even dancing.⁹⁴

To some extent Baptist preachers filled those “gaps” which emerged due to the fact that the life in Lutheran parishes had weakened or the church was located too far from the believers’ place of residence. The Baptist preachers satisfied the wishes of Christians thirsting for the “spiritual food”. The Consistory of Courland noted that “the individual wandering Baptist preachers

were especially dangerous for Lutheran parishes, since they traveled to the places where the spiritual needs of residents were not and could not be fully satisfied⁹⁵. According to the data of the Ev. Lutheran General Consistory, in 1896 there were 5 thousand Baptists in the Province of Courland.⁹⁶ However, there were still those Baptists who did not consider it necessary to report to the police about their faith, therefore, it is difficult to tell the actual number. It is also known that in 1896 there were 70 Lutherans who expressed a wish to join the Baptist parish, and 54 Baptists wanted to return to their previous Lutheran parish.⁹⁷

THE LEGAL STATUS OF BAPTISTS IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Already from the 18th century the Russian Empire was challenged by the new term “religious tolerance”. This tolerance was rooted not only in the philosophy of the Enlightenment Age, but also in the policy of Empress Catherine the Great. As the territory of the Empire was expanding, the tsar’s citizens were people of diverse nationalities and religions. As long as they lived in peace and harmony, as well as contributed to the economic growth of the country, they were not considered a threat. As stated by prof. P. W. Werth: “By the early 19th century, then, imperial Russia had an established tradition of toleration that was based on the imperatives of empire-building, the maintenance of social stability, and the promotion of the country’s modernization. It involved acceptance of non-Orthodox religions in Russia, but great hostility towards heterodox proselytism.”⁹⁸ It should be emphasized, that the content of religious tolerance in early 19th century Russia was not specified. Since there were no definitions and clarifications provided for this term, the state authorities were not restricted from interpreting it freely, reviewing each case individually.⁹⁹

The question of Baptism is a vivid example. Very shortly after Baptists emerged, the Department of Religious Cases of Foreign Denominations of the Ministry of the Interior received informa-

tion about the activities of this movement's followers. If the reports from the Province of Courland were only negative, the information from the Province of Volhynia was positive or neutral.¹⁰⁰ The first Baptists (around 200 families) arrived around 1859 from the territories inhabited by the Polish people.¹⁰¹ The Baptists usually chose the most respectable and educated persons as the representatives of their parishes, and, of course, as the individuals to give speeches in public. It was also noted that one could become the elder of the parish only on those occasions when other elders agreed that the respective person was decent enough, and they had tested the candidate's knowledge in theology. This information completely contradicts the information provided by the Lutheran pastors in Courland, who tried to persuade everyone that Baptist preachers were "the darkest people with a bad reputation". Pursuant to the information available to the General Governor of Volhynia, there was no official test for Baptist preachers, yet usually they were people who had graduated from the Hamburg School of Missionaries.¹⁰² Finally, it was emphasized that the Baptist community in the Province of Volhynia was known for Christian reconciliation, love towards the nearest and obedience to authorities. They stood out with a reserved way of life. There was not a single complaint that would provide evidence on arbitrary actions of Baptists or invasion of other persons. They solved all their disputes within their community, meaning those who did not comply with the decisions of the majority were excluded from the parish. All their members were "common people". If there was a need to find differences between Baptists and other Christian parishes, the Baptists stood out with better knowledge of the core postulates, and they were especially knowledgeable in the New Testament.¹⁰³

After 1861, the relationship between the Baptists of Courland and the Lutheran Church became strained. The reason for conflict was the separation of Baptists from the Lutheran parish. The Baptists refused to baptize their children at the Lutheran church. Thus, these children could be regarded as illegitimate and guardianship had to be considered for them. The Baptists refused

to get married at the Lutheran church and to bury their deceased relatives according to the Lutheran tradition, whereas the Lutheran parishes prohibited burying the Baptists in the parish cemetery, namely, in holy land.¹⁰⁴ It turned out that the secrecy of the Baptists' actions and the fact that their movement was pursued attracted more and more followers.

The opinion of the Ministry of the Interior regarding Baptists was neutral, even favourable. According to several draft laws prepared by the Department of Religious Cases of Foreign Denominations in the 1860s¹⁰⁵, the Ministry held a view that the new religious movement could be announced as tolerable in the Empire, comparing it to other Christian denominations in terms of rights and duties. However, the mentioned draft laws were not adopted due to the strictly negative attitude of the Ev. Lutheran General Consistory and the caution of the highest state authorities.

Already in October 1864, the Minister of the Interior Pyotr Valuyev (*Пётр Валуев*, 1861–1868) submitted a proposal to the Cabinet of Ministers¹⁰⁶ asking to apply regulations to the Baptists of Courland which would give them an opportunity to write their own metric records, namely, to register the new-born children, marriages and the deceased members of the parish. The proposal was declined. The members of the Cabinet indicated that the number of Baptist followers in Courland was too small (around 400 people), therefore it would not be useful to issue special regulations for such an insignificant number of believers. Besides, such regulations would confirm the official existence of a "sect", implying that it was tolerable in the Empire. Such a legitimization of Baptism would be premature and would only attach too much importance to the movement.¹⁰⁷ The Baptists of Volhynia were not taken into consideration this time.

Thus, an unusual situation arose – the preaching of Baptism was neither allowed, nor prohibited in the Russian Empire. Because the movement did not have official permission to preach their doctrine, the local authorities subjected its members to various punishments, but because Baptism was not forbidden the

penalized persons were often acquitted in St. Petersburg. The Baptists had close ties with other countries, especially Prussia¹⁰⁸, therefore foreign parishes got involved in the defence of brothers in Courland. In August 1865, Emperor Alexander II received a letter from Baptists J. G. Onken (Hamburg) and (?) Nymec (Memel) expressing their indignation about the fact that the freedom of conscience was oppressed and religious persecutions took place in his country.¹⁰⁹ The most active member of the Baptist movement in Courland, Adam Gertner sent repeated requests to the Minister of the Interior asking for the movement to be regarded in the same way as other tolerable denominations.¹¹⁰

To take control of the situation, the Governor General of the Baltic Provinces instructed the Governor of Courland Johann von Brevern to submit the list of Baptist cases that were under investigation or in court proceedings. He also ordered regulations to be passed which would stipulate that “in the event there were Baptist conflicts with the Church or local administration regarding the issues of faith, the order that was applicable to the dominant Orthodox Church and Lutherans should be followed”¹¹¹. Namely, it was asked to pass these cases to the Governor General, who either moved the case forward or left it without any notice. On the basis of this order, on 8th November 1865 the Governor of Courland issued instructions to the municipalities and the boards of police noting that the arrest of Baptists was permissible only in those events when the person had violated the law. In addition, the Governor General definitely had to be informed about the case; he would then review it and take the final decision. Finally, all currently submitted claim statements against Baptists had to be terminated in order to produce the list and pass it to the Governor General.¹¹²

In 1866, elaboration of the draft law on the tentative order applicable to Baptists started with a new vigour. Documents which contain data about the process of elaboration and adoption of the respective draft law have been preserved in the cases of the Ministry of the Interior. The articles in the Cabinet of Ministers were elaborated and corrected taking into account the order

submitted to the Cabinet on 19th October 1864 and the opinions expressed by the Governors General of the Baltics, Kiev, Podolia and Volhynia, as well as by the Minister of the Interior.¹¹³ It must be noted that over the elaboration of the draft law, the opinion of the Governor General of the Baltic Provinces Pyotr Shuvalov¹¹⁴ was more liberal than the opinion expressed by the Minister of the Interior Pyotr Valuyev, because the latter had a better knowledge in denominational politics and was of the opinion that the activities of Baptists had to be regulated, taking into account the legal status of other denominations so that the Baptists were not granted some advantages.¹¹⁵

Although the agreement regarding the text of the tentative order was already coordinated, the draft law was still not passed for adoption.¹¹⁶ In January 1866, the Governor General of the Baltic Provinces repeatedly pointed out that tentative regulations applicable to the activities of Baptists should be adopted, because the Lutherans of Courland treated them according to the example of Prussia, where Lutherans as the dominant denomination considered Baptists as “apostates”. It was also repeated that Baptists did not act against the national interests, therefore the sooner the movement was able to act without restrictions the less followers they would have.¹¹⁷

In January 1867, the draft law was passed for reviewing in the State Council, which forwarded the case to the Second Section of His Imperial Majesty’s Own Chancery or the Imperial Legislation Department.¹¹⁸ Despite the fact that the officials of the Department did not see any obstacles which would forbid giving the Baptists the status of a tolerable denomination in the Empire¹¹⁹, the case was not moved forward.

While the unexplainable delay in St. Petersburg continued, the Baptists at the local level had to “enjoy the fruits” of their indeterminate legal status. On December 1869 the Governor General of the Baltic Provinces introduced the Minister of the Interior to a significant case which accurately characterized the manifestations of unsettled legal issues on a domestic level.¹²⁰ Taking into account the conflicts regarding the burial of deceased

Baptists in Lutheran cemeteries, the Governor General had asked the Governor of Courland to ensure the Baptists did not have any obstacles to burying their deceased relatives in Lutheran cemeteries until they had permission to arrange their own cemeteries. This question was coordinated with the Ev. Lutheran Consistory of Courland, which agreed that the Baptists could bury their deceased relatives in the existing cemeteries according to their rituals, since they were not insulting the Christian doctrine in any way.¹²¹ The only condition that the Consistory stipulated was that the Baptists obeyed the orders of the police, namely, that they paid a certain sum for the maintenance of the cemetery and that they provided a prior notice regarding the Baptist burial to the local priest and the Cemetery Administration. The administration had to appoint an acolyte, whose duty would be to ensure that “due to the potential Baptist enthusiasm/inclination/obsession the religious feelings of the members of Lutheran parishes and the holiness of cemeteries would not be insulted”¹²². These terms and conditions clearly characterize the opinion of Lutherans in Courland – the Baptists were people who acted outside the law and they could not be trusted.

The Ev. Lutheran Consistory of Courland also indicated that permission to bury Baptists in Lutheran cemeteries should be regarded only as a tentative solution, because they hoped that the issue of their own cemeteries would soon be solved. At the same time, the Lutherans were entitled not to give the permission to Baptists in the event they “dared to manifest actions or words that would be insulting to the Lutheran Church at the moment the coffin was covered with earth”¹²³. It must be noted that such a wording was rather vague and once again proved that the Lutheran Church as the dominant denomination was entitled to determine the behaviour of the newcomers. The Governor General of the Baltic Provinces indicated that a parish cemetery was a property of the Ev. Lutheran Church (as stipulated by law), therefore the Lutherans had rights to act using their own discretion. Thus, their terms were reasoned and fair. In the conclusion once again it was asked to pass the Tentative Order or Terms. To avoid

further religious clashes, it was noted in the draft law that “the Baptists (at least in Courland) had to bury their deceased relatives in their own cemeteries”.¹²⁴

In further years too, the issue was not solved, although it seemed that most of the high profile state officials were absolutely convinced that the legal regulation of Baptists was necessary. For example, in 1870 Pyotr Shuvalov, the former Governor General of the Baltic Provinces, at the time the Chief of the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty’s Own Chancery, expressed his opinion about new religious trends in the Empire: “Experience shows that the spying tactics pursued by the government against various schismatic movements has been unsuccessful and on some occasions has even increased their fanaticism, given rise to fellow-feeling towards the chased [Baptists] as the martyrs of faith and has led to completely opposite results than expected.”¹²⁵

Only on 27 March 1879 the State Council approved the Tentative Order for the Baptist Metric Records. This law can be considered as legitimizing Baptism in the Russian Empire. It stipulated that:

“Without obstacles Baptists can profess their faith and carry out rituals according to their customs. They can hold their public worships in specially allocated houses after they have coordinated it with the Governor;

The spiritual leaders and representatives chosen by the Baptists (the elders, teachers and preachers) can perform legal actions and organise public worships only after the Governor has given his approval for them to hold such a position. The spiritual leaders from abroad have to swear an oath regarding their acolyte service while they are residing in Russia.

The metric records of Baptists are made by the local secular power.”¹²⁶

The adoption of this law eased the activities of Baptist parishes. The Baptists obtained an official legal status. On 12th November 1879, the Senate approved the forms of the Baptist metric records.¹²⁷ It was stipulated in law that the Baptists could make civil registry records or church metrics. They became completely

independent from the Lutheran parishes. It must be noted that in the Tentative Order of 27th March the Ministry of the Interior was asked to elaborate a draft law which would regulate the activities of all "Protestant sects" in the Empire.¹²⁸

Why was so much time required for adopting the legal regulation? This can be explained by the fact that the government of Russia could not clearly define its attitude towards new religious movements and therefore applied waiting tactics. A push for adopting the final decision was provided by the loud protests of foreign Baptist organisations and the necessity to find a solution to the administrative chaos because Baptists had no possibility to register their civil registration records.

CONCLUSIONS

The Baptist preachers emerged in the Russian Empire soon after the first parishes were founded in Prussia, that is, in the 1840s. After the Province of Volhynia, the Province of Courland became one of the most important centres of Baptist movements. Up to 1879, the legal status of Baptists in the Russian Empire was not officially stipulated. Initially it could be explained with the government's trust in the Ev. Lutheran General Consistory, which was of the opinion that the movement would only be short-lived and that the Baptist followers would return to their previous parishes after certain persuasion was carried out. Later the adoption of law was delayed due to the government's lack of interest in solving this issue.

The expansion of Courland Baptists should be explained by a set of religious, social and political factors. The political background was formed by the coming to power of Alexander II, the new liberal ruler of Russia providing hope for change in all areas of life. The social background was dominated by dissatisfaction with the agrarian issue and the privileged position of the Baltic Germans. Regarding the life of the church, the converts were not satisfied with the spiritual modesty (in particular demonstrated by their attitude towards alcohol consumption) prevailing at the

Lutheran parishes and the close links between priests and the nobility. The increase in the number of Courland Baptists should mainly be related to the active work of the mission, their skills in speaking to people and also the live testimony provided by them of maintaining their faith despite being targeted by the Lutheran church and the authorities. Hamburg as the centre of the mission played an important role in the process of formation of the first parishes, however, generally the importance of the foreign factor should not be overestimated. The Baptist parishes formed not only in cities, but also in rural areas. Ventspils and Liepāja were two of the most important Baptism centres, and have maintained their position until now.

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In 1899 a priest did not give a notice to Lize Paule, initially excusing himself with the lack of time and busyness, later saying that he had not received a confirmation from Lize's father, since she was not of age yet. The father was unable to come to the priest, but expressed his will with the mediation of his wife and other witnesses. Demanding the confirmation from the girl's father, the priest at least for a while had delayed the girl's transfer to Baptism.
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PIRMO KURZEMES BAPTISTU DRAUDŽU VEIDOŠANĀS RELIĢISKAIS, SOCIĀLAIS UN POLITISKAIS KONTEKSTS

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19. gs. 60. gados Kurzeme kļuva par vienu no pirmajiem un nozīmīgākajiem baptisma kustības izplatības centriem Krievijas impērijā, turklāt jaunajai kustībai vēlējās pievienoties ne tikai pilsētās dzīvojošie vācieši, bet arī laukos dzīvojošie latvieši. Raksts sniedz pārskatu par Kurzemes baptistu aktivitātēm līdz 1879. gadam jeb līdz viņu atzīšanai no valsts puses, analizējot jaunās reliģiskās kustības izplatīšanās veicinošos un kavējošos faktoros. Raksta mērķis ir rast atbildi uz jautājumu, vai pirmo Kurzemes baptistu draudžu izveide būtu saistāma ar ticīgo reliģisko pārliecību, viņu neapmierinātību ar savu sociālo statusu vai arī ar politisku protestu pret evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas monopolu Krievijas impērijas Baltijas guberņās.

Atslēgas vārdi: ev. luterāņi, baptisti, sekta, Baltijas guberņas, konfesionālā politika.

Kopsavilkums

19. gs. otrā puse ir nozīmīgs laiks Krievijas impērijas vēsturē. Iepriekšējais, cara Nikolaja I (1825–1855) radītais, represīvais režīms, kas cerēja ar stingru aizliegumu palīdzību pasargāt Krieviju no Rietumeiropā notiekošajiem procesiem, ilgtermiņā izrādījās neefektīvs. Pēc Krievijas sakāves

Krimas karā bija skaidrs, ka valstī nepieciešamas reformas. Kad pie varas nāca imperators Aleksandrs II (1855), tās arī tika uzsāktas. Reformas skāra gandrīz visas dzīves jomas. Nozīmīgākās no tām bija: dzimtbūšanas atcelšana, cenzūras ierobežošana, atļauja veidot biedrības, kā arī izglītības, pilsētu pārvaldes un tiesu sistēmas reforma. Šie pasākumi deva cerības, ka impērijā gan indivīdiem, gan personu grupām tiks dota lielāka rīcības brīvība.

19. gs. otrā pusē ir lielu pārmaiņu laiks arī Baltijas guberņās. Lai gan dzimtbūšanas atcelšana te bija notikusi vairākus gadu desmitus agrāk nekā pārējā impērijā, tomēr tās reālie augļi bija jūtami tikai 19. gs. 60. gados, kad zemnieki jau bija savas saimniecības izpirkuši. Līdz ar saimniecisko patstāvību viņos modās arī lielāka pašapziņa. Latviešu zemniekiem beidzot bija iespēja būt mobilākiem, pašiem izvēlēties savu dzīvesvietu, sūtīt bērnus augstākās skolās. Šajā gaisotnē radās arī ideja par nepieciešamību pēc sirdsapziņas brīvības, kas ļautu katram pašam izvēlēties savu ticību.

Mūsdienās baptisti ir viena no Latvijas tradicionālajām konfesijām un viņi vairs netiek uzskatīti par kaut ko neparastu, svešu un bīstamu. Tomēr līdz šādai attieksmei bija jānoiet garš un grūts ceļš. Kurzeme bija viens no senākajiem baptistu kustības centriem visā Krievijas impērijā – pirmie baptisti te parādījās jau 19. gs. 50. gadu beigās. To lielā mērā sekmēja ģeogrāfiskā atrašanās vieta – tuvums Hamburgai un Mēmelei, kur darbojās pirmās baptistu draudzes Prūsijā. Starp šo teritoriju iedzīvotājiem (galvenokārt pilsētniekiem) pastāvēja intensīvi sakari, kas nodrošināja apmaiņu ar dažādām idejām, to skaitā garīgām.

Jaunu reliģisku strāvojumu ienākšana tā laika sabiedrībā apdraudēja pastāvošās reliģiskās institūcijas. Īpaši asi pret pirmajiem baptistiem vērsās Kurzemes evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas mācītāji, kuri darīja visu, lai, izmantojot savu autoritāti un monopoltiesības ticības jautājumos, nepieļautu baptisma ideju izplatīšanos Baltijas guberņās. Savukārt Volinijas guberņas laicīgās un garīgās varas iestādes pret jauno kustību neizturējās tik aizdomīgi, viņu attieksme bija drīzāk neitrāla. Baptisms te sākumā neskāra pareizticīgo baznīcas intereses, jo tas izplatījās vācu kolonistu – luterāņu – zemnieku vidū. Līdz ar to tieši Kurzemes evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas viedoklis bija izšķiroši svarīgs jautājumā par to, vai un kad baptistiem tiks atļauts brīvi darboties Krievijas impērijā. Šajā publikācijā tiek meklētas atbildes uz šādiem jautājumiem: kas sekmēja baptisma izplatīšanos Kurzemē? Kas noteica kustības popularitāti – politiski, sociāli vai reliģiski iemesli? Kādu loma baptisma draudžu atzīšanas jautājumā bija vācu faktoram, ev. luteriskajai baznīcai un Krievijas impērijas varas iestādēm?

Balstoties uz pieejamajiem vēstures avotiem, raksta autore nonākusi pie šādiem secinājumiem: Kurzemes baptistu izplatīšanās ir skaidrojama ar reliģisko, sociālo un politisku faktoru kopumu. Politisko fonu veidoja jaunā liberālā Krievijas valdnieka Aleksandra II nākšana pie varas, kas deva cerības uz pārmaiņām visās dzīves jomās. Sociālais fons bija neapmierinātība ar agrāro jautājumu, kā arī vācbaltiešu muižniecības privileģēto stāvokli. Baznīcas dzīvē baptistus visvairāk neapmierināja luterāņu draudzēs valdošā garīgā remdenība (īpaši attieksmē pret alkohola lietošanu), kā arī luterāņu mācītāju ciešās saites ar muižniecību. Kurzemes baptistu skaita pieaugums galvenokārt būtu jāsaista ar aktīvu misijas darbu, prasmi uzrunāt ticīgos, kā arī viņu pašu dzīvi kā liecību par turēšanos pie ticības, par spīti piedzīvotajām vajāšanām. Svarīga loma pirmo latviešu draudžu veidošanās procesā bija Hamburgai kā misijas centram, tomēr tās nozīme nebūtu arī jāpārvērtē.

Līdz pat 1879. gadam baptistu tiesiskais statuss impērijā nebija oficiāli noteikts. Sākotnēji to varēja skaidrot ar valdības uzticēšanos ev. luteriskās baznīcas ģenerālkonsistorijas atzinumam, ka šai kustībai ir tikai īslaicīgs raksturs un baptistu sekotāji drīz vien atgriezīsies savās iepriekšējās draudzēs, bet vēlāk likuma pieņemšanu kavēja valdības nevēlēšanās šo jautājumu risināt. Tikai 1879. gada 27. martā Valsts padome apstiprināja "Pagaidu kārtību baptistu metriskajiem ierakstiem". Tās pieņemšanu sekmēja ne tikai Eiropas baptistu organizāciju vairākkārt skaļi paustie paziņojumi par ticīgo vajāšanām Krievijas impērijā, bet arī administratīvais haoss, kas bija radies tāpēc, ka baptistiem nebija iespējas reģistrēt kristības, laulības un mirušos draudzes locekļus.

Kurzemes baptistu draudzes ir unikālas ar to, ka tās veidojušās ne tikai vācu, bet arī latviešu un lībiešu vidē. Turklāt tās radās ne vien pilsētās, bet arī lauku apvidos. Divi nozīmīgākie baptistu centri – Ventspils un Liepāja – kā tādi ir saglabājušies līdz pat mūsu dienām.