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English Summary

The Origins of the Baptist Movement among the Hungarians: A History of the Baptists in the Kingdom of Hungary From 1846 to 1893

This study examines the origins of the Baptist movement among the Hungarians within the Kingdom of Hungary from the first, ultimately unsuccessful attempt to plant a Baptist mission in Hungary in 1846 and follows the story through 1893. The end date of the study was chosen based upon conventional dating among Hungarian Baptist church historians because it marks a point in time in which the mission was firmly implanted in the country and was about to enter into a period of struggle between Heinrich Meyer, the German missionary who began the second, successful attempt to establish a Baptist mission in Hungary in 1873, and a rising generation of indigenous Magyar Baptist leaders. The primary question I seek to answer is why the first attempt in 1846 to plant a sustained Baptist mission in the Kingdom of Hungary failed, while the second attempt beginning in 1873 succeeded. A related question of exploration is if there is any organic connection between the first and second attempts?

The first attempt to establish a Baptist presence in Hungary began when three ethnic Germans born in Hungary, and raised as Roman Catholics, were converted to the Baptist faith in Hamburg, Germany, through the ministry of the father of Continental Baptists, Johann Gerhard Oncken. These men were sent back to Hungary in 1846 by Oncken at the request of the missionaries of the Scottish Mission to the Jews then active in Budapest to help with Bible colportage and literature evangelism. The leading figure in this group was Johann Rottmayer, who was from Budapest and remained active in ministry in Hungary the longest. For a brief period of time a part of this group, lead by Johann Woyka, attempted to establish a work in Woyka's home city of Pécs. The work continued in Budapest through the Revolution of 1848, but following the crushing of the Hungarian war for independence in 1849, open work ceased. Only Johann Rottmayer remained in Hungary and continued a quiet ministry in Budapest until a personal financial crisis in 1866 almost caused him to immigrate to America. Instead he was offered a position with the British and Foreign Bible Society to open a depot in the capital city of Transylvania, Kolozsvár, in order to pioneer Bible colportage in the region. With his departure from Budapest the Baptist work in the city ceased and the first attempt to establish a Baptist mission in Hungary came to an unsuccessful conclusion.

However, this was not the end of Johann Rottmayer's contribution to the Baptist mission in Hungary. I devote a chapter of this study to examine the work of Rottmayer and his friend Antal Novák (who was converted through the ministry of Rottmayer) as Bible colporteurs. Through an intensive examination of primary materials from the British and Foreign Bible Society and

Hungarian religious periodical literature, I further develop the argument made by other Hungarian Baptist historians that the work of these two men prepared the mission field for the work of Heinrich Meyer. Thus an organic link does exist between the first and second attempts to establish a Baptist mission in Hungary.

Finally, I examine the work of Heinrich Meyer, the father of the Hungarian Baptists, who arrived in Budapest in 1873 to work for the British and Foreign Bible Society, but who soon left their service in order to focus all his energy on the Baptist mission work. Meyer's early efforts are examined, and I explore the social composition of the movement and its internal life. I also provide a critical examination of the turning point of the Baptist mission to Hungary, the beginnings of the Magyar mission, which soon eclipsed in size the German-oriented mission of Heinrich Meyer. The origins of the Magyar mission lies in the work of Antal Novák and his Bible colportage work in Nagyszalonta. Novák shared his Baptist faith with several of his contacts in Nagyszalonta, and when these people expressed a desire to be baptized, Novák connected them with Meyer in Budapest. I follow the flowering of the Magyar mission, and in particular I examine the mission work of one from among the first group of converts, Mihály Kornya, who became the greatest example of the first generation of indigenous Magyar Baptist leaders known as the "peasant prophets". Over his lifetime Kornya is reputed to have baptized over 10,000 people. I conclude this section with an examination of the persecution faced by the early Baptists and the unsuccessful attempts of Heinrich Meyer to achieve state recognition for the Baptists in order to deal with aspects of this discrimination.

I conclude my study with an answer to the primary question I posed, which is why did the second attempt to establish a sustained Baptist mission in Hungary succeed where the first attempt failed. I provide three reasons. First is that the radically different political environment in post-Compromise Hungary provided sufficient religious freedom for the Baptist mission to succeed. Second, I argue that Heinrich Meyer was able to build upon the work of others who prepared the field for him, in particular I point to the Bible colportage work of Johann Rottmayer and Antal Novák. Finally, Meyer was presented with the opportunity to expand the Baptist mission from his focus on the German minority in Hungary to the indigenous Magyar population, and the success of the Magyar mission under the leadership of peasant evangelists ensured that the Baptist mission enjoyed a strong base of support among the dominant ethnic group in the Kingdom of Hungary.