

This is John Klassen's second book on the "free churches" in Germany. His earlier publication, *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Entwicklung und Theologie* (Bonn, 2009), was his doctoral dissertation from South Africa. The two books are required reading for anyone who wishes to know about the mission work the Mennonite Brethren are doing in Germany and Austria.

The book includes numerous black and white photographs of the new churches and their leaders, a map of Germany with the places where new churches have been planted, helpful tables, and a useful bibliography.

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Johann E. Pritzkau, *German Baptists in South Russia*. trans. Walter Regehr. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2013. Pp. 185. Softcover.

In 1914, Johann Pritzkau's German-language history of the German Baptist movement in South Russia (current-day Ukraine) was published. As a minister and an active participant from the mid-nineteenth century beginnings of the church, Pritzkau viewed it as his duty to produce an account of the German Baptists' past history and present circumstances. This English translation of Pritzkau's original work opens the door for new readers to explore the factors shaping the development of the Baptist movement in Russia. Pritzkau offers important insights into how the confessional system in the Russian empire influenced interactions between the Baptists and other groups, such as the Mennonite Brethren, Lutherans, Catholics, Russian Baptists, and state officials in the region.

Pritzkau organizes his book into three parts: an early history of German Baptists in South Russia; historical sketches of various church congregations; and an assessment of the German Baptists at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first section follows the Baptists from their early beginnings through to their legal recognition by the Russian state. Covering the religious revivals inspired by Pietism, which spread through German-speaking communities, Pritzkau provides insight into the relationships that sustained the movement from its beginnings. He acknowledges the importance of Mennonite Brethren believers in supporting and inspiring German Baptists; yet, he also illustrates how the confessional system of the Russian empire,

based on privileges, limited the institutional, although not the spiritual, connections between them.

The Baptist faith spread among German communities in the empire throughout the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Over ten chapters, Pritzkau presents sketches of German Baptist communities in South Russia, the Crimea, and the Caucasus, giving brief histories of the development of these religious communities. These histories show the conditions under which the Baptist faith established roots in the empire and highlights how issues of land, neighbours, and religious competition influenced the strength of community life.

Finally, Pritzkau offers an assessment of the Baptists and their future. He identifies the spiritual state of their youth as being of paramount concern, emphasizing the need to organize strong Sunday schools and youth societies (147, 150). He also stresses lethargy, worldliness, and emigration as dangers to building strong Baptist communities. According to Pritzkau, the Baptists had experienced years of peace and security, which he worried had made them passive in their faith. Yet, he acknowledges the many external developments during this period of calm that pointed to a positive future in Russia. Baptists, Pritzkau felt, had convinced the state that they did not pose a political threat and instead were “moral and God-fearing Christians, and loyal subjects” (166). Although German Baptists had official religious status in the empire, the imperial proclamation of freedom of conscience in 1905 allowed them to associate more freely with other Russian and German evangelicals (139). And the new freedom of the press after 1905 enabled them to move the publication of their newspaper, *Hausfreund*, from Germany to Russia, thereby strengthening the unity of the movement (140).

Pritzkau’s book is an important insider perspective into the religiously complex landscape of South Russia and the interactions between individuals, local communities, and the state as the Russian empire moved from a system based on religious toleration and privilege towards acknowledging freedom of conscience. Completed before the Bolsheviks’ takeover of power, it shows how the German Baptists understood their faith and their relationship to the empire in the twilight of imperial Russia.

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