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## PERSECUTION AND GROWTH

### A Hundred Years of Baptist Life in Romania

In Romania the one hundredth anniversary of the beginnings of Baptist work seems to have gone unmarked, at least as far as the present writer can determine. This may be due to the situation in the country, which until the final weeks of 1989 remained unaffected by moves towards openness and greater freedom in the Soviet Union and other countries in the Eastern Bloc. Such a situation probably did not lend itself to celebrations of this kind.<sup>1</sup> It may also be due in part to the various, rather involved, beginnings of the Baptist churches in the country, which make it difficult to decide on a clear date for any centenary celebrations. Although Baptists were present and active in Romania from around 1850, the first Romanian Baptist church was not formed until the 1880s and, indeed, there is uncertainty on the precise date. Some authorities cite 1885 as the year, others prefer 1888 (see below).

A further difficulty arises from the fact that in the nineteenth century the borders of Romania (or Rumania, as it was then known) were considerably different from the present ones and the first Romanian church was formed in Transylvania, which at the time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>2</sup> Border changes, so frequent in central Europe, complicate the history of any group and for anyone born and brought up in our islands increase the 'foreignness' - but also the challenge - of such study. The north-eastern province of Moldavia and the southern province of Wallachia were still parts of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1822 they secured autonomy within the Empire, were joined together in 1861 and achieved full independence in 1878. At the end of the Great War in 1918 Bessarabia, on the north-eastern border of Moldavia, was obtained from Russia (only to be lost again after the Second World War to become the Moldavian S.S.R.). Transylvania was ceded from Hungary as the Austro-Hungarian Empire was broken up, the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 confirming the results of a plebiscite, though two million of the population of Transylvania remain of Hungarian origin. Hungary regained two-fifths of the area from 1940-44, but it was restored to Romania after the war.

In Wallachia and Moldavia the Romanian Orthodox Church has been the dominant church since the conversion of the Bulgarian prince, Boris, in the ninth century. Until the close of the Second World War, the influence of the Orthodox Church on the government was strong and semi-official discrimination was practised against other religious groups. Baptists often suffered discrimination and virtual persecution. In Transylvania, whilst the Romanian Orthodox Church is strong among the Romanian majority, the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church are also well represented, especially amongst the Hungarian population. The beginnings of Baptist work in Transylvania coincided with a time of religious toleration from the Austro-Hungarian authorities and so opposition was more local, from the parish priests (either Orthodox or Catholic) and, through them, from the traditional village leaders.

#### Nineteenth-Century Beginnings

The first Baptist work in Romania was among German speakers and, as with so many of the Continental Baptist churches, was associated with Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800-1884), 'the Father of Continental Baptists'.<sup>3</sup> A German carpenter, named Karl Scharschmidt, baptised by Oncken in Germany in 1845, moved to Bucharest with his wife, Augusta, where he settled and became very active in evangelism. In 1856 a small German Baptist church was organised and met in a house in Popa Rusa Street.

A chapel was eventually built which Oncken visited in 1869.<sup>4</sup>

Around this time a group of Russian Baptist immigrants from the southern Ukraine moved into the area around Dobrogei, between Bucharest and the Black Sea, and established a Baptist church in Cataloi in 1862. In addition, a member of the Bucharest church, A. Liebig, worked among Russian immigrants in the region of the Danube Estuary, north-east of the capital, and in 1870 the first Russian converts were baptised and formed a church in Tulcea.<sup>5</sup>

The first work among ethnic Romanians in Bucharest was begun by Constantin Adorian, himself a Romanian, who was converted and baptised in the German Baptist church in Bucharest, studied in the Baptist Seminary at Hamburg, and returned to become the first pastor of the Romanian Baptist church in Bucharest in 1912.<sup>6</sup> At the same time a Romanian Baptist from Arad in Transylvania, Radu Tasca, worked among Romanians in the Dobrogei area and organised several churches.

Baptist work among ethnic Romanians in Transylvania, at the time still part of the Habsburg Empire, had already begun, though here too the work began among non-Romanians. In 1871 Antal Novak, a tailor by trade but also working as a colporteur of the British and Foreign Bible Society, who had already gathered a small group of believers in Gyula, a Hungarian village still in present-day Hungary, visited a Bible study group in Salonta Mare, forty kilometres to the east, now in Romania. There he discussed with them the subject of Believer's Baptism. In 1875 he invited Heinrich Meyer, a former representative of the Bible Society who had been expelled for baptising contrary to the Society's mandate, to visit the groups. Meyer baptised eight people at Gyula and six at Salonta: Baptist work in Transylvania was thus commenced, among Hungarians. Mihai Cornea, who was converted and baptised at Salonta, became very active in western Transylvania, particularly evangelising Romanians, and through him the first Romanian Baptist church was formed in 1885 (or 1888) in Chess in the Crisana area.<sup>7</sup> Cornea trained a large number of able peasant preachers who became missionaries to other villages in the area, as well as further afield.

Growth was rapid and by 1910 there were 147 Baptist churches in Transylvania, both Hungarian and Romanian. The open attitude of the Austro-Hungarian authorities enabled the churches to grow and spread, opposition being confined to local protests. However, even in the Romanian borders, where opposition was more orchestrated under the influence of the Orthodox hierarchy, the churches grew and spread.<sup>8</sup>

### After the Great War

In 1919, when the Romanian Baptist Union was formed, uniting Baptist churches in Moldavia, Wallachia, Bessarabia and Transylvania, there were a total of 598 churches; the total number of members was 18,751 but there were only 51 preachers.<sup>9</sup> In 1921 there were 633 churches with 21,193 members (14,000 Romanian, 6223 Hungarian, 670 German and 300 Russian). In 1922, in spite of official opposition, a total of 2265 baptisms took place,<sup>10</sup> and by 1931 there were 1525 churches with 47,205 members. In other words, over a ten year period the number of churches and of members had more than doubled. In 1936<sup>11</sup> there were 420 churches (this should probably read 1420), 370 pastors and missionaries, 65,880 members and 18,800 scholars in Sunday Schools. In 1921 a Baptist seminary had been started,<sup>12</sup> and in 1923 the Southern Baptist Convention provided funds for the erection of a Seminary building in Bucharest. In 1929 a sister school, the Baptist Missionary Training School, was opened to train young women for work in the churches.<sup>13</sup> In 1936 they established their own 'foreign' missionary society and also began home mission work among the

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gypsies of Romania.<sup>14</sup>

All this was in the face of considerable pressure from the Orthodox Church on the government to curtail the activity of the Baptists, not only in Moldavia and Wallachia but throughout the whole of the newly-enlarged nation. Nevertheless, despite much harsh treatment, which at times amounted to persecution, the churches continued to grow.

For the first ten years after the war, the persecution was severe. The American Committee on the Rights of Religious Minorities stated that Baptists were 'bitterly persecuted' in the mid-1920s under the Liberal Party leader, Ion Bratianu.<sup>15</sup> While freedom of worship was granted by some post-war Romanian governments to most religious groups, the Baptists were usually excepted. They were forbidden from holding worship or burial services, and from selling Bibles; their property was seized and ministers were fined or imprisoned. There was an easing of the situation from 1928 to 1936, but from 1937 to 1944 they again suffered severe repression. For four months, from December 1938 till April 1939, all Baptist churches were officially closed. Representations from the Baptist World Alliance and from American Baptists secured some relief,<sup>16</sup> but the situation remained desperate until the fall of Ion Antonescu in 1944.

In 1920 the Baptist World Alliance, at its first Conference after the close of the Great War, had appointed the Rev. J. H. Rushbrooke as its first European Commissioner, initially for three years and eventually for five.<sup>17</sup> Rushbrooke, together with the Rev. Charles A. Brooks of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Board, had already made a nine-week tour of the various countries of Eastern and Central Europe which had been devastated through the War, and reported their findings to the Conference. The Conference also decided that the various Baptist Unions and Conventions of Great Britain, Western Europe, America and Australia should co-operate with and assist the Baptist groups in the countries of Eastern, Central and Southern Europe. The Southern Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. took responsibility for Romania, Hungary, the Ukraine and parts of Russia.<sup>18</sup> J. H. Rushbrooke organised and led many deputations to Romanian government ministers, seeking to ease the oppressed situation of the Baptist churches. On the first of these visits in 1921, he took with him Dr T. R. Glover, who had recently been elected Public Orator of Cambridge University. They met the Prime Minister, Mr Take Ionescu, and other ministers and secured some easement of the situation, although sadly shortlived.<sup>19</sup> Glover shocked the minister by telling him that, judged by his behaviour and attitudes, he belonged to the seventeenth century rather than the twentieth!<sup>20</sup>

### The Second World War

In 1940 when the Russians invaded the country, Romania placed herself under German protection, with the result that the fascist Iron Guard increased in influence and both Jews and others suffered. In 1942 all Baptist churches were closed by order of the fascists and in December a law called for 'the abolition of the Baptist cult' (Decree No.972, 1942). All properties were confiscated. Figures for the period during and since the Second World War are extremely confusing. Statistics of membership etc. in the *Baptist Handbook*, as supplied by the Baptist World Alliance, remained unchanged from 1937 to 1965. According to the Rev. Alexei Popovici, in 1942 there were 1684 churches with 536 ordained ministers and 1280 unordained lay preachers and 93,843 members,<sup>21</sup> whereas Alan Scarfe cites another estimate of the numbers as in the region of 38,000.<sup>22</sup>

In 1944 the Romanians joined the Allied side and for the last nine months of

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the war fought against Germany, in this period suffering some 150,000 casualties both military and civilian. At the conclusion of hostilities, Romania received back the area of northern Transylvania lost during the war, but was forced to cede Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, both with a large number of sizeable Baptist churches, to the Soviet Union. These factors would lead us to expect a fall in total membership, although the figure of 30,000 in 1945 cited by Josef Ton<sup>23</sup> seems too low.

With the break-up of the fascist dictatorship, a new law was issued in November 1944 which recognised the Baptists as a legal denomination. The new constitution for socialist Romania in 1948 granted 'freedom of religious worship', with the statement that 'the religious denominations shall be free to organise themselves and may freely function'.<sup>24</sup>

### Since 1945: Freedom and Revival

From 1945 onwards the country came under Soviet influence. King Michael continued to reign as constitutional monarch until 1947, when he abdicated and the country became a 'People's Republic'. The Communist-dominated Democratic Front, which came to power in 1945, became a single party in 1948, and the Romanian Social Democratic Party was forcibly 'merged' with the Romanian Workers' Party. From 1945 till the end of 1947 the Baptists enjoyed complete freedom and experienced great revival,<sup>25</sup> the Orthodox hierarchy having little influence with the new government. For the next seven years also the churches were not subject to state pressure or control and growth continued. The Baptist magazine, *Indrumatorul Crestin Baptist* (The Baptist Guide), commenced publication in 1946 and has continued to appear up to the present.<sup>26</sup> Enrolment in the seminary reached its peak in 1951 with 118 students.<sup>27</sup>

### The Church under Siege

Pressure from the government began in 1955, and reached a peak during the years from 1959 to 1974. From 1965 until 1971 there was a temporary 'thaw' as Nicolae Ceausescu assumed the position of Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party following the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and until he had consolidated his power.<sup>28</sup> However, it remains broadly true that for a fifteen-year period,<sup>29</sup> the churches were subjected to a systematic campaign from the authorities with a view to weakening and, if possible, destroying their effectiveness. Baptists, together with all the churches, including the Orthodox Church,<sup>30</sup> were under direct attack in a variety of ways. These may be summarised as follows:<sup>31</sup>

1. Attempts to influence the leadership of the denominations, seeking either to manipulate the existing leaders by bribes or threats, or to replace them with those who were more 'amenable'.
2. Attempts to infiltrate and manipulate the leadership of the local church, and in various ways restrict and curtail its outreach. This involved the withdrawal of preaching licences for all kinds of trivial reasons.
3. A systematic effort to make pastors and priests the targets of attack, by threats, smear tactics, physical assaults etc., with a view either to limiting their effectiveness or to securing their departure from their pastoral office.
4. Seeking to discourage and dishearten individual believers by discrimination in education and employment, by indoctrination and propaganda and by harassment.

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Many of the measures restricting church activity were, in fact, put into operation by the denominational leaders, who were forced to implement the orders of the Department of Cults, which were very often unwritten, so that it would appear that they were decisions of the denomination, rather than those of the government.<sup>32</sup>

Of the 1196 Baptist churches and preaching stations, 532 were closed as 'unnecessary'. Of the 952 pastors, 787 lost their licences for 'irregularities'. Only a few students were permitted to study in the seminary in Bucharest, usually less than ten.<sup>33</sup> Pastors were only permitted to preach in their own churches; they were not allowed to accept invitations to preach in other congregations. No evangelism, no children's work, no youth work, no special meetings for men or women, no charity work with church funds were permitted. Lists of church officers and potential officers had to be officially approved, as did lists of baptismal candidates. Only those who had Baptist parents could be baptised; all other baptisms were looked on as the illegal 'proselytising' of Orthodox members: in this one regard, Orthodox views were accepted, and used, by the state authorities.

During this period many of the finest pastors lost their licences and many left the country. The churches suffered stagnation and decline. Baptisms were few and even children of Baptist parents refused to be baptised and left the churches, because of the potential victimisation they would suffer if they identified themselves as believers. Josef Ton, in conversation with the author, has spoken of 'a lost generation', a fifteen-year age gap in the churches, as the result of the oppression of those years. In some cases pastors ignored the rules and baptised new converts surreptitiously, under cover of darkness. These were dubbed 'black baptisms'. In most cases, however, it seems that the churches accepted the restrictions and sought simply to hold on and try to survive.<sup>34</sup>

### The Great Change: The Beginning of the Present Growth

In 1973-74 a great change began which resulted in a period of remarkable growth which has been sustained up to the present. A number of factors seem to have contributed to this, including a courageous and more positive attitude among a number of the pastors and churches, together with a number of concessions granted by the government in response to pressure both from within the country and internationally. In particular, the need to make some concessions in return for favourable trade agreements meant that significant relaxation was made on a number of the more important issues.

In the autumn of 1973 Josef Ton, who had recently returned to Romania after studying at Regent's Park College, Oxford, wrote and circulated a paper entitled 'The Present Situation of the Baptist Church in Romania', addressed to the Baptist Union, in which he traced the development of state and Baptist church relations since 1954. He claimed that the state had interfered with church affairs and was imposing its will on the pastors and churches through unwritten directives which the denominational leaders were being forced to implement. He stated that this was both illegal and an infringement of the Lordship of Christ over His Church. Although the paper was confiscated by the authorities and his right to preach was withdrawn, he was soon supported by fifty pastors from around the country (about one third of those who still held licences after the purges already made), who signed a petition to the Council of State in November 1973, supporting Ton's points. No reply was received from the state, so these pastors began to administer their churches according to the statutory position, to invite unauthorised preachers, including Ton, to preach, to baptise believers without first submitting their names to the Department of Cults for approval, and to prepare to hold independent elections of local church officers. The

leadership of the Baptist Union, supported by the European Baptist Federation, soon began negotiations with the Department of Cults for official sanction of the activities which had been adopted independently by the pastors.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, Ton's paper was translated and published in England by Keston College and copies were sent to Christian Senators and Congressmen in Washington, where President Ceausescu was negotiating the 'Most Favoured Nation' agreement between his nation and the U.S.A. It was put to Ceausescu that the religious abuses mentioned in Ton's paper should be rectified before the agreement could be put into operation. When the Romanian president returned home, he appears to have agreed to certain concessions, which included the restoration of licences to some pastors.<sup>36</sup> Among these was Liviu Olah, a pastor from Timisoara. The president of the Baptist Union, Nicolae Covaci, who was also a pastor in Oradea in the north-west of the country, agreed to take Olah as his assistant. Soon Olah was preaching in Oradea with electrifying effect and the results, as they were reported, gave further heart to those who were engaged in unofficial action.<sup>37</sup>

A period of amazing growth began in Oradea and, eventually, throughout the whole Baptist denomination in Romania. It was also very soon being paralleled by similar growth in the Pentecostal and Brethren denominations.<sup>38</sup> The annual number of baptisms soared as Romanians, curious to find out more about the Baptists whose activities and experiences were becoming well-known, began attending services, were exposed to vigorous evangelistic preaching and began to be converted and baptised.

Although a number of concessions were made by the Department of Cults, including a relaxation on the number of meetings permitted each week for the local congregation, these were only given verbally and not in writing. Furthermore, the restriction on baptisms was not lifted, but pastors began increasingly to ignore this regulation and to baptise those who were professing conversion. Baptisms were reported at the rate of at least 20,000 each year.<sup>39</sup> The growth of the churches, which had been curtailed since 1959 by the oppressive restrictions, was resumed and has continued to the present time, although full figures are not available.<sup>40</sup> For a number of years since the mid-1970s the official figure was quoted unchanged as 160,000, but unofficially estimates range from 200,000 to 300,000.<sup>41</sup> It is to be hoped that in the new situation the growth will continue and also that accurate facts and figures will eventually become available.

## Conclusion

The churches continued to experience opposition and persecution from the government right up to the dramatic events of the final week of December 1989. Pastors were threatened and sometimes physically attacked.<sup>42</sup> Others were brutally interrogated or imprisoned. Those who criticised the religious oppression in the country were excluded from the denomination.<sup>43</sup> Some were forced to emigrate.<sup>44</sup> Church buildings were demolished or threatened with demolition.<sup>45</sup> Some of the events of those years can be pieced together from news items in the western press, both religious and secular, but the full story may only be completely told when the situation becomes stabilised.

The speed of the revolutionary events which finally toppled the regime of Nicolae Ceausescu, together with the bloodshed which accompanied and followed those events and the freedom now being experienced, has left Romanians of all kinds shocked and bemused. The time is not yet appropriate to ask many of the questions which rise in the enquiring mind regarding the past.

At the end of their first hundred years of existence, Romanian Baptist churches are now suddenly faced with a new revolutionary situation. Having maintained their

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courageous witness and continued to grow under constant pressure from the state authorities for so long, they are now confronted with the challenge of witnessing in, and contributing to, a new Romania. Socially and economically, the country is in dire straits. Many of its citizens, including many pastors, left the country during the times of repression. These have been invited by the new provisional government to return and involve themselves in rebuilding the shattered fabric of the society.<sup>46</sup> Baptists in other countries, enjoying far greater freedoms, can help in many ways, and are already doing so, but they can also learn several lessons from the fortitude over so many years of their brothers and sisters in Romania.

### NOTES

1. The new situation created by the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime probably requires that Baptists and all Christians in the country focus on the present and the future rather than the past.
2. The issue of Transylvania is sensitive, especially to Hungarians. The author has often been gently corrected by Hungarian friends when using the current Romanian place-names rather than the Hungarian equivalents. For a helpful, brief summary of the history of Transylvania from the Hungarian point of view, see George Gomori, 'Transylvania: the land between', *The World Today*, vol.43, no.11, Nov.1987, pp.200-1.
3. J. H. Rushbrooke, *The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe*, 1923, p.17. Oncken had been converted in England in 1822, baptised as a believer in the Elbe at Hamburg in 1834, and for the next fifty years preached and established Baptist churches all over the area covered by the German Federation and beyond. Either through his visits or indirectly through his influence, Baptist churches were begun in many countries in Eastern Europe. W. L. Wagner, *New Move Forward in Europe*, S. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978, pp.75-117.
4. Wagner, *op.cit.*, p.109.
5. I. Bunaciu, 'Romania', in *Baptists in Europe*, ed. G. Keith Parker, Nashville, p.216.
6. Bunaciu, *op.cit.*, p.216; Wagner, *op.cit.*, p.110, gives the date of the first Romanian Baptist church in Bucharest as 1915.
7. Bunaciu, *op.cit.*, pp.216-7.
8. According to David Britton Funderburk, 'Baptists in Rumania since World War I', *BQ* 24, 1971-2, p.135, 'Growth ... was barely noticeable prior to World War I'. This is probably too pessimistic, although the growth in the Habsburg regions of Transylvania, Bukovina, the Banat and the Russian province of Bessarabia was far greater and more rapid.
9. *The Roumanian Missionary Society Newsletter*, Vol.1, no.1, Dec.1968, 1.
10. As reported by the Rev. C. Adorian to the Baptist World Congress in Stockholm in 1923, F. Townley Lord, *Baptist World Fellowship: A Short History of the Baptist World Alliance*, 1955, 49.
11. According to figures cited in the *Baptist Handbook* 1937.
12. The Rev. Ioan Socaciu was involved in founding the Seminary and taught there for many years. Baptised in the U.S.A. where he attended college and seminary, he returned to Romania to train preachers and pastors, *The Voice of Truth* (Romanian Missionary Society), vol.21 no.5, 1989, 4. The seminary was begun in Buteni, a village in Transylvania, but Orthodox opposition closed it after five months. It reopened in nearby Arad with classes held in a small Baptist church in the town and then moved to Bucharest, classes being held in a German Baptist church until the Southern Baptists built the present facility with classrooms, a dormitory and apartments for the seminary director and general secretary of the Baptist Union.
13. *Roumanian Missionary Society Newsletter* 1968, *op.cit.*
14. Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, Philadelphia, 1950, *op.cit.*, 209.
15. *Roumanian Ten Years After*, 7-8, cited in Funderburk, *op.cit.* p.138.
16. F. Townley Lord, *op.cit.*, pp.92-3, 106.
17. Ernest A. Payne, *James Henry Rushbrooke 1870-1947 A Baptist Greatheart*, 1954, pp.34-41; Townley Lord, *op.cit.*, p.39.
18. *Ibid.*, pp.39-41; J. H. Rushbrooke, 'European Baptist Reconstruction', *BQ* 11, 1942-5, pp.355-6.
19. Payne, *op.cit.*, p.44.
20. M. E. Aubrey, 'J. H. Rushbrooke', *BQ* 15, 1953-4, p.371.
21. *The Roumanian Missionary Society Newsletter*, Vol.1 no.1, 1968. See also 'A hundred and ten years of Baptists in Romania', *European Baptist*, Vol.VII no.1, 1967.
22. 'Romanian Baptists and the State', *Religion in Communist Lands* (hereafter RCL), Vol.4 no.2, 1976, p.19. If that figure is correct, the drop may be accounted for by the forced cession of northern Transylvania to Hungary during the period 1940-44, as well as deaths during the Russian invasion and casualties in the Romanian army's part in the invasion of Russia from 1941 onwards. On the other hand, the number of churches given by Popovici compared with the pre-war figures argue for the larger number.
23. Quoted by B. Bultman, 'Trial and Triumph',



- Sparks, Wheaton, Ill. Institute of Slavic Studies, Vol.5 no.4, p.11.
24. Bunaciu, op.cit. p.217.
  25. Josef Ton, 'The Evangelicals of Romania', *Exploits* 33, Eastbourne: Slavic Gospel Association, p.4. However, it seems unlikely that the membership total of 200,000 for 1947, as given by Funderburk (1971-2), is anywhere near true, especially as he gives the figure for the time of writing as 75,000.
  26. An editorial in the issue for April 1986, marking the fortieth year of publication, surveys the four previous decades and concludes that the journal is 'a further proof of the religious freedom which the Baptist denomination enjoys today in socialist Romania'. The 'News from Romania' section usually gives several short reports of industrial, economic and technological successes, and there is often a long article on some aspect of the secular life of the country, such as Romania's role in preserving international peace. (Review of vols.XXXIX-XXXXI in *RCL* vol.14 no.3, 1986, pp.307-8).
  27. Josef Ton, 'A History of the Baptist Seminary in Romania', *Sparks* vol.6 no.2, Apr-June 1982, p.5.
  28. Vladimir Tismaneanu, 'Ceausescu's Socialism', *Problems of Communism*, vol.XXXIV, Jan-Feb 1985, pp.60-1, comments: 'Once his power was consolidated, however, Ceausescu returned to tighter ideological control that resembled the Stalinist era. After an official visit to China in 1971, he apparently became convinced that a cultural mini-revolution would cure ... the "liberalism" among the Romanian intelligentsia. He presented his views in the so-called July Theses, which are a model of political obscurantism and unrepentant Stalinism. In 1971 [he] launched a campaign to order ideological, cultural and educational activity along Marxist lines.' For similar comments see the excellent survey of the Ceausescu years by Jonathan Eyal, 'Romania: a hermit under pressure', *The World Today* vol.45 no.5, May 1989.
  29. The temporary 'thaw' is referred to by D. B. Funderburk, *BQ* 24, 1971-2, pp.135-9, although he had no idea that it was only temporary. He wrote: 'The new religious tolerance by the Rumanian Socialist Republic is largely attributable to President Nicolae Ceausescu. Gradually, since 1965, Ceausescu has directed a liberalisation in government policy towards religion...'. He noted that the Orthodox Church had been the main beneficiary, but said that all the churches were somewhat better off. Dr Ronald Goulding, the Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, is quoted in a footnote as saying that further concessions have been received by Baptists, including the fact that they have been permitted to receive a few Bibles, they were allowed to open their churches for mid-week services and send leaders to international Baptist gatherings. In addition, officers of the Baptist World Alliance were allowed to visit Romanian Baptist churches. Even as the article was being printed, the repression was being reintroduced and tightened. However, visits by representatives of the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance continued. See, for example, *Baptist Times* 20 Dec. 1973 on the visit of Dr R. Goulding and Dr D. Russell, interceding with the Department of Cults for Josef Ton after his expulsion from the faculty of the Baptist Seminary; *Journal of Church and State*, 1979, pp.440, 442, on visits by BWA delegates in May and November 1974; *European Baptist Press Service* 14 Feb. 1977, on the visit by Dr Gerhard Class of the EBF and Dr Denton Lotz of the Southern Baptist Convention to the 27th Congress of the Romanian Baptist Union and for discussions with government officials.
  30. In 1968 the Orthodox Church received official permission to print 100,000 Bibles, 30,000 in 1968, the remainder in the next two years. Another 250,000 Bibles and New Testaments were printed in the next five years. Most, if not all, went to Orthodox churches, monasteries and individuals; few reached Baptists and other Christians, who relied almost entirely on unofficial distribution of Scriptures from abroad. (See Walter Sawatsky, 'Bible Work in Eastern Europe since 1945', Parts 1 & 2 in *RCL* no.3, 1975; pp.4-10 and no.4, 1976, pp.4-14.
  31. For details and documentation see: Josef Ton, *The Present Situation of the Baptist Church in Romania*, Keston College, 1973; Alan Scarfe, 'Romanian Baptists and the State', *RCL* 4, 1976, pp.14-20; Alan Scarfe, 'Romanian Baptist Congress', *RCL* 5, 1977, pp.94-104; Alan Scarfe, 'Romanian Baptist Church Grows Under Persecution', unpublished paper, Keston College, 1978; Alan Scarfe, 'A Call for Truth: An Appraisal of Rumanian Baptist Church-State Relationships', *Journal of Church and State*, 1979, pp.431-449; Josef Ton, *Religious Persecution in Romania*, Wheaton, Ill. Romanian Missionary Society 1985.
  32. This account, as much of what follows, depends heavily on one man and accounts of the denominational leaders give a different picture, but this is to be expected if Ton's claim that the denominational leaders were manipulated by the Department of Cults is correct. Scarfe agrees with Ton and he had access to other persons and documents. The overthrow of Ceausescu may allow those involved to speak more openly than hitherto.
  32. 'Instructions' were the unwritten dispositions handed down to the various churches by the Department of Cults through the denominational leaders. Ton, op.cit., 1973, p.15.
  33. *RCL*, vol.2 nos.4 & 5, Oct.1974, pp.36-7, contains a letter from a graduate of the Baptist Seminary who subsequently enrolled in the Philosophy Faculty at Bucharest University. Because he openly declared his faith

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- in God, he was expelled from the University by the Rector's office and subsequent protests failed to secure a reversal of the decision.
34. Statistics supplied in the *Baptist Handbook* for 1965, the first available since 1937, seem to reflect a different picture: in 1964 1500 churches, 435 pastors, 83,000 members and 37,115 Sunday School scholars. The last statistic is particularly surprising, as Ton's account suggests that all children's activities were suspended. Possibly the temporary easing of pressure when Ceausescu first came to power caused the Romanian Baptist Union to expect a return to the pre-1959 situation. The number of churches and members are probably estimated. The *Baptist Handbook* for 1971 gives the number of Baptists in Romania in February 1970 as 120,000. The latest figures from the Baptist World Alliance (1989) give total membership as 160,000 in 66 churches, giving the average church over 2400 members - there is clearly something wrong with these figures!
  35. For a summary of these events see Scarfe, 'A Call for Truth', pp.435-7. At the 27th Congress of the Romanian Baptist Union in February 1977, the General Secretary, Pastor Ioachim Tunea, claimed that negotiations between the Union and the Department of Cults to obtain certain relaxations were under way earlier in 1973 and Ton's paper and the petition of 50 pastors hindered them. Such negotiations would not have been documented, so we cannot discover whether the claim is true.
  36. The account of these events was derived orally from Ton by the author. To the best of his knowledge it does not appear anywhere in print.
  37. For a Western Baptist's impression of Olah's preaching, see John A. Moore in *European Baptist Press Service*, 24 Dec. 1974, pp.3-4. For a brief account of the growth of the church in Oradea following the appointment of Liviu Olah, see R. E. Davies, 'Taking the Pledge', *Frontier: Religion and Communism*, Keston College, July-August 1989, pp.12-16.
  38. The author has not been able to determine whether or not other groups, such as the Seventh Day Adventists or the Lord's Army (the unofficial renewal movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church) also benefited. The Lutheran Church, which ministers almost exclusively to the German minority, and the Hungarian Reformed Church would probably not have been affected in the same way, due to their virtual confinement to these ethnic groups.
  39. This was officially announced at the 17th Congress of the Romanian Baptist Union in Feb. 1972 by the General Secretary (Scarfe, 1977, p.98 note 1), who stated that since 1972 a total of 100,000 had been baptised (*European Baptist Press Service* 1977 p.14). Either the Secretary himself, or those who interpreted his words, implied that 20,000 had been baptised each year since 1972. This was clearly not the case: the restrictions imposed by the Department of Cults were still being adhered to by pastors until the beginning of 1974 (apart from surreptitious 'black baptisms'). In Oradea there were only 34 baptisms in 1972 and 42 in 1973 (annual baptism and membership figures for 1972-86 supplied by a current pastor). These figures represent the total of all those baptised in the Oradea Association, as during the period of restriction all from the wider district were baptised at an annual service at the Second Baptist Church. In 1974, 356 were baptised by Liviu Olah, most as a direct result of his preaching. Thereafter each local church conducted its own baptisms. Figures for Oradea then fluctuate: 112 in 1975, 105 in 1976, 62 in 1977 (the year Olah left the pastorate and country), 247 in 1978 (Ton's first full year as pastor), 132 in 1979, 123 in 1980. As the 'revival', spread from Oradea, statistics for the whole denomination are likely to reflect a similar pattern. If 100,000 had been baptised between 1972 and Feb. 1977, when the Congress was held, then the average figure for 1974-76 would be closer to 30,000.
  40. In July 1975, the *Baptist Times* stated that the Romanian Baptist churches had increased by 10,000 members in the previous year ('Trend Reversed' 3 July 1975).
  41. Scarfe, 1976, p.19. Official figures appear to err on the side of caution. Mihai Husan, newly elected President of the Union, told the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Berlin in July 1984 that numbers were increasing at the rate of 3,600 per year, 'Romanian Baptists under New Leadership', *RCL* vol.13 no.1, Spring 1985, pp.94-7. Unofficial sources put the figure much higher, pointing out that many churches do not send their figures to the Union and the Union often reports minimal annual increases to avoid pressure from the Department of Cults to put further restrictions on the churches. The membership figures given by the BWA for 1989 are far too low (see note 34 above) and the number of churches wildly out. The figure normally quoted is around 1200.
  42. The author has spoken with at least three pastors on whose lives there had been serious attempts - two in car crashes and one by electrocution. Later interviews with the Securitate convinced each man that the 'accidents' were deliberately engineered.
  43. See the denominational leaders' letter to churches, *RCL* vol.7 no.3, Autumn 1979, pp.173-4.
  44. Two pastors in Medias, the Rev. Ioan Stef and Rev. Benjamin Cocar, and the latter's brother Buni, a pastor in Bucharest, emigrated to the USA in 1987 after a long history of problems with the authorities and the Baptist Union.
  45. The building of the Baptist Church in Comanesti, constructed by members, was demolished by the authorities in May 1989.

## THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

The pastor's licence was withdrawn and four deacons tried and found guilty of using 'stolen building materials' ('On trial in Romania', *Frontier: Religion and Communism*, Jan-Feb 1990, pp.2-3. Other churches have faced difficulties and frustrations over many years over buildings, sometimes being threatened with demolition without compensation or suitable alternative being offered, e.g. the Mihai Bravu Church in Bucharest and Second Baptist in Oradea.

46. This historical article must conclude but the story continues. See item in *Keston News Service*, 11 Jan. 1990, 'New Baptist Committee formed by Romanian Baptist Ministers', pp.6-7, which reports on a committee to promote the Baptist cause nationally and how Petru Dugulescu, pastor of First Baptist Church in Timisoara (who was the subject of physical attack and persecution from the Securitate a few years ago) addressed a crowd of 100,000 in the city's main square on Thursday, 21

December, the day before Ceausescu was toppled. The next day he preached to 200,000. Josef Ton returned to Romania on 30 December, his first visit since exiled in 1981. He was given permission to use a sports hall and preached on Sunday, 31 December to 7000 in the morning and 9000 in the evening. He met Dumitri Mazilu, the new Vice-President (since resigned), and helped to form the Romanian National Evangelical Association to present a unified Evangelical voice within the country and hopes to form a Christian Democratic Party to field candidates for the April general elections. He himself intends to stand for Oradea, where he hopes to settle. He has now been appointed as senior pastor of the church which he led until his exile. Vasile Talos, pastor of Mihai Bravu Church, one of the pastors referred to in note 42, appeared on national television giving a Christmas message to the nation.

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## THE PAYNE MEMORIAL ESSAY COMPETITION 1991

### MISSION: HOME AND OVERSEAS

The Baptist Historical Society offers a prize of £75 for an essay on this theme, chosen with the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society in mind. The awarders wish to underline that home mission or home support as well as activities overseas fall within this brief, that the essay may be an historical or contemporary study, and that they would welcome essays which were theological as well as historical treatments of the theme.

The essay should be an original, unpublished composition, based on personal research, that has not already been awarded another prize. The text should not exceed 10,000 words, but the submission should also include whatever footnotes and bibliography are considered necessary. It should be in typescript or clear computer print-out.

There is no restriction of academic qualification, place of residence or religious profession on candidates. The winning essay, and any other deemed worthy, will be published in the Society's journal, *The Baptist Quarterly*. The Society reserves the right to make no award if an essay of sufficient merit is not submitted.

Candidates should send their essays to arrive on or before 31st December 1991. Envelopes should be marked 'Payne Memorial Essay Competition' and addressed to The Secretary, Baptist Historical Society, Bristol Baptist College, Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UN.

*The Payne Memorial Essay Competition commemorates the life and work of the Revd Dr E. A. Payne CH (1902-80), General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, a Vice-President of the World Council of Churches and President of the Baptist Historical Society.*