

# The Baptist Movement in Romania in its Historical and Religious Context

Dinu Moga<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Protestantism influenced Eastern Europe through the Radical Reformation, through German Pietism and especially through a number of Neo-Protestant movements which taught the necessity of personal saving faith and stressed the importance of a holy and disciplined life. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century a number of Christian groups emerged in Romania. Among these were the Baptists, whose life and ministry was not easy in its history.

The fall of communism in 1989 gave a sudden freedom to all the evangelical churches which began to experience a revived activity. A new era for the rebirth and development of the Baptist faith and its Christian education began in Romania. This essay is aiming to explain how it all began and developed in an environment which was hostile in most of the situations.

**KEY WORDS:** Protestantism, Byzantine orthodoxy, Catholicism, Radical Reformation, conversion, Dacia, Latin, Slavs, Hungarians, Anabaptists, animism, fetishism, naturism, Communism, persecution, saving faith.

## THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF ROMANIA FROM THE BEGINNING TO 1856

Evangelical Christianity in Romania<sup>2</sup> developed over a period of a century and a half and in the context of Eastern Orthodoxy which molded the whole life and

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Dinu Moga is General Director and founder of Făclia Publishing House, Oradea, Romania and lecturer in Church History and Dogmatics at Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania. [dinu@faclia.ro](mailto:dinu@faclia.ro)

<sup>2</sup> According to the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (RNIS) the population of Romania in 2014 was 19.5 million of which 90% are Romanians. The remaining 10% are ethnic minorities, including Hungarians and Gypsies. The dominant religion is Orthodoxy, 85.9% of the population adhering to it, and the second largest is Protestantism with 6.2% followers. The Roman-Catholics represent 4.6%, the Greek-Catholics, 0.8% and the Seventh Day Adventists 0.5%. The Reformed Church has 3.2% followers, mainly among the Hungarian and Germanic population of Romania. The Pentecostals represent 1.9% and the Baptists 0.6% of the total population. Data is taken from the official site of the RNIS at <http://www.insse.ro>. See also [http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Comunicat-presa\\_Rezultate-](http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Comunicat-presa_Rezultate-)

belief of the nation. Although most scholars would say that Eastern Europe, with its form of Eastern Orthodoxy, never experienced a Protestant Reformation, it is argued by non-Orthodox historians that beginning in the sixteenth century the movement initiated by Luther, Calvin and the rest of the Reformers had a limited, but important, impact on the people of Romania. This impact was most importantly felt through the transmission of the Scriptures in the Romanian language. Over this period various non-Orthodox Christian groups spread and developed in many Eastern European countries. Among these countries Romania also experienced a sequence of events which facilitated the emergence of new religious movements within its territories.

Protestantism influenced Eastern Europe through the Radical Reformation, through German Pietism and especially through a number of Neo-Protestant movements which taught the necessity of personal saving faith and stressed the importance of a holy and disciplined life. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century a number of Christian groups emerged in Romania. These are the five main evangelical movements in Romania today: the Baptists, the Plymouth Brethren, the Pentecostals, the *Tudorist* Movement and the Evangelical wing of the Orthodox Church, also called the Lord's Army (*Oastea Domnului*)<sup>3</sup>. The *Tudorist* movement and the *Oastea Domnului* sprang up as independent renewal movements within the Romanian Orthodox Church and through their doctrinal emphasis they belong to the Evangelical tradition.<sup>4</sup> The members of these two movements are all Bible-believing Christians who claim to have had a personal conversion experience and presently nurture a sincere desire to proclaim the biblical message of salvation through faith alone.

Before the Baptist movement emerged in Romania in 1856<sup>5</sup> the country was known as the heir of the Christianity of the ancient Roman province of Dacia.

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preliminare.pdf. One must not forget that the Romanian Baptists were persecuted by the Communist regime prior to 1989. It is only since the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century that Baptists have experienced unprecedented freedom. According to recent estimates the Evangelical believers in Romania would make of 5 % of the population. Some ethnic groups, like the Gypsies and the Turks, are just beginning to be reached with the Gospel.

<sup>3</sup> Among the leaders of these movements, Dumitru Cornilescu produced the most loved translation of the Bible in modern Romanian. This Bible is largely used today in all the evangelical churches in Romania.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed account about these two movements within the Orthodox Church of Romania is given in a master thesis by Adrian Stănculescu, *Romanian Evangelical Christianity: Historical Origins and Development Prior to the Communist Period* submitted to Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, May, 2002, pp. 304-361.

<sup>5</sup> This is the year when a good number of German craftsmen arrived in Bucharest in order to settled down and find new jobs opportunities. Among these Germans a man called Karl Johann

Dacia was an imperial province established in the second century by the Emperor Trajan for his veterans. Under the influence of the Romans, the people of Dacia adopted the Latin language and the Christian faith. It has been proved that the initial stage of Christianity in Romania had a Latin form and that until today the primary religious words in the Romanian Church are of Latin origin. Church tradition looks to the planting of the Gospel in Romania by the missionary efforts of the apostle Andrew around the Black Sea shores.

It has to be said that the Christianization of the Romanians took place in a period when adopting the Christian religion did not mean a radical break from the beliefs and the practices of the past, but only an exchange of the names of the pagan deities for the names of “saints”. Keeping the old pagan beliefs and practices, even though not formally accepted by the hierarchy of the church, could be overlooked, and it was indeed overlooked with great ease. The result of this compromise is well described today by a secular Romanian historian. He proves that syncretism between Christian faith and pagan popular religion characterizes the Orthodox religion of the Romanian people today. Here is what he says:

Our history did not experience a dramatic uprooting of the old deities, but a retaining of the popular paganism, with some adjustments to Christianity... For instance, burying the clay doll, *caloianul*, the veneration of the prehistoric idols of clay. Even today we have the sacrifices of the white roosters which are given to the priests at burial ceremonies, symbolizing sacrifices on the altars of different gods. The celebration of nature when children dress in green leaves, like in pantheist religions, the ritual dance around the fire, are traces of this pagan popular cult ... There were no demolished temples, nor broken idols, there was no conflict here, not even in people’s conscience, as the inhabitant of the villages, keeping his old traditions, did not see any contradiction between the old and the new faith. He bowed down before the new herald that was ushered in, and entered the church bringing his prehistoric rituals before the altar.<sup>6</sup>

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Scharschmidt and his wife arrived in Budapest on 30<sup>th</sup> of April 1856 in an oxen pulled cart. Through this Baptist couple the pure teaching of the New Testament also arrived in Romania. See Alexa Popovici, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din România 1856-1989* [The History of the Baptists in Romania 1856-1989] revised edition (Oradea: Făclia & Universitatea Emanuel, 2007), p.17. See also Ian M. Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009), pp. 137-158.

<sup>6</sup> Petre P. Panaitescu, *Introducere la Istoria Culturii Românești* [An Introduction to the History of Romanian Culture] (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1969), pp. 102-103. The

By the third century Christians were so strong in Dacia that they attracted the attention of the Emperor Diocletian, and many became victims of the Great Persecution initiated by him at the dawn of the fourth century. After the division of the empire in 395 A.D. and the separation of the two major spheres of medieval Christianity led by Rome and Constantinople, the Romanian lands became a border between Eastern and Western Churches, and a disputed area between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. One of the great patristic theologians of the Romanian Orthodox Church of these times was John Cassian. He became a foundational figure in ascetical theology and marked in equal measure the Eastern and Western monastic culture.<sup>7</sup>

The Latin basis of the Romanian Church continued to remain part of the special character of Romanian Orthodoxy, whose geographical position continues to be a bridge between Latin and Greek ecclesiastical worlds. While the Romanians pride themselves on being the only Latin nation which embraced the Orthodox faith, contrasted with Poland which is the only Slavic nation which embraced the Roman Church, they look back and count the cost of what it meant to be a Latin nation surrounded by the Slavs and Hungarians.

Beginning with the fifth century, the territory of the former Dacia became part of the Byzantine administration. In 602 the Slavs descended from north of the Black Sea and occupied much of the Balkan Peninsula. Despite their undeveloped civilization, by the eighth century they achieved political and social domination in Dacia. We know that when Dacia was drawn under the authority of the Bulgarian Empire, in the year 860 A.D., the population of Dacia was forced to exchange Roman-Catholicism for Byzantine orthodoxy. In the same year, Cyril and his brother Methodius worked as missionaries among the Slavs and established the Slavonic language in their liturgy. Against the opposition of the Roman-Catholic Church these two brothers translated the Bible into the language which was later known as the Old Slavonic and invented a Slavic alphabet based on Greek characters. This is how the liturgical and literary language of the Balkans was established. From then onwards the Romanians adopted Slavonic liturgy and Bulgarian ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In their homes they spoke a Latin language, but in their churches they worshipped in a Slavonic language which was imposed upon them under the

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translation is taken from Stănculescu, *Romanian Evangelical Christianity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23. Similar comments on this aspect are made by Iosif Țon in his book *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] (Oradea: Cartea Creștină, 2009), p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church – An Introduction to its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2008), p. 66ff.

threat of being otherwise anathematized and which the priests themselves could barely read.

Joseph Ton explains what it meant for the Romanians to come under the influence of Byzantium and the Slavonic language.<sup>8</sup> It produced at least two important effects. First, Romania cut itself off from contact with Western Europe with all the benefits it would have gained from that relationship. Secondly, Byzantine Orthodoxy never placed any importance on having a theologically educated clergy. The role of the orthodox priest was to perform rituals, and the measure of his theological training was limited to what he needed to know in order to baptize, celebrate liturgies, hold confessions, anoint, officiate at marriages, burials, services for dead people, sanctify waters and other things, read from the books to “bind” or “loose” on earth, services for rain and fertility, etc. When for about one thousand years you had church services conducted compulsorily in a language which the priest could not read and the people could not understand, the inevitable result was a Romanian “Christian” religion reduced to the mere carrying out of rituals. The priest was unable to teach anything else except the necessity of fulfilling these rituals. The final result of this process was to keep the Romanian people captive for centuries in great spiritual darkness.

Over the years the fact that the orthodox religion of the Romanian people is so far removed from the teaching of the Bible has raised sharp criticism from scholars. Some of these were nominally orthodox: others were actually students of orthodox theology.<sup>9</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century these people began to produce valuable research into the popular beliefs of the Romanians. The twentieth century followed up with other studies, but these were sweetened by the authors’ nationalist-orthodox thinking: an approach that continued in other similar studies produced under the communist regime. After 1989, when the communist regime collapsed in Romania, much more objective studies began to be published.

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<sup>8</sup> Ton, *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190.

<sup>9</sup> The first two studies were commenced in 1884 and 1893 by two Romanian scholars named B. P. Hașdeu and N. Densușianu. Gheorghe F. Ciușanu studied theology in 1908 in Râmnicu Vâlcea, became an orthodox priest and a lecturer in Romania. The Romanian Academy announced a prize of 5,000 Lei to be offered for the best study on “The superstitions of the Romanian people compared with those of other nations”. He started to research and after six years produced one of the best studies about the superstitions of the Romanians. He wrote the book and received the prize in 1913, but after 1944 his book was forbidden by the communist authorities for the years to come and it was only republished after 1990. Detailed account is provided in Ton, *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] *op. cit.*, pp. 190-221.

These scholars were specialists in their own fields. Visiting people where they lived, they produced research which contained a collection and systematization of the beliefs, customs and religious practices of those Orthodox Romanians. Their conclusions about the religion of the people are worrying. The thing which struck them most was the pagan character of the life and thinking of the people they interviewed (manifested through customs and practices celebrated at different events in their lives). Ciușanu concluded in his study: “Alongside the official religion lives [in Romania] – maybe with much more vitality – the superstition. It constitutes a true religion of the many and finds itself in great strength, because it is the oldest form of religion: a mixture of fragments of animism, fetishism and naturism... The nation never understood her superior beliefs in their true spirit. She only retained, in fact, her primitive beliefs, superstitious, adopting only formally and superficially the new concepts of religion, which were much higher than her level of intellect”. He continues: “Christianity, when it was seeking to root itself within the nations – among which the Romanian nation is also a part – found here a paganism that has existed for hundreds of years, allied with fragments of animism, fetishism and naturism. A fight has then started among the old and banded together religions and the new, lonely and helpless, religion of Christianity. But neither one side, nor the other capitulated. Eventually they struck a bargain and made peace: each one giving in a bit to the other. And out of this peace was born a mixed religion which we can see still today in the life of the Romanian people”.<sup>10</sup> These researchers continue to speak about the presence among those who called themselves orthodox believers of a Romanian Pantheon, magic, witchcraft, incantation, fights against the evil one, and the involvement of the Orthodox priests in magic, poltergeist practices and exorcism.

Apart from these observations it needs to be said that there were numbers of believers in the Orthodox Church of Romania who suffered under the communist regime. The state secret police, the Securitate, was especially brutal in communist Romania, and there were many examples of the suppression of individual dissidents, monks and priests, amounting to many victims in the course of the last two generations. Under the 1959 sustained communist crackdown against the Orthodox Church, five hundred priests and leading monks were arrested and subjected to the infamous communist show-trial. Two mass trials were held, inflicting sentences of between eight and twenty-five

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Ton in *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.

years in prisons and forced-labour camps.<sup>11</sup> But professor Boia of the University of Bucharest makes an important remark when he says that „the acts of resistance were individual ones, of certain clergy, but never of the Orthodox Church, as an institution (capable, in the 80’s, of accepting without murmuring even the demolition of many of their churches). The difference is great”, he continues to say, “compared to the predominant Catholic countries from Central Europe, where the Church has assumed a “worldly” mission, the one of preserving the civic and political values despised by communism (the exemplar case of Poland)”.<sup>12</sup>

What can we say about the state of Orthodoxy in Romania today? Looking at the way the majority of so called orthodox believers live their orthodox faith, Ton concludes in his book that the orthodoxy of many in Romania “has fallen from Christianity into paganism”.<sup>13</sup> Harsh words to say about a tradition which “generally regarded the church world-wide up to the Middle Ages as «their church »”<sup>14</sup>, but this cannot be denied for it is very visible and it is documented by the television media almost every week. The sorceresses around Bucharest not only prosper, raising their palaces and self-proclaiming themselves with the deplorable title of “the queens of white magic”, but also receive visits from high level personalities: politicians, sports celebrities and great business people, all belonging and confessing to be “faithful orthodox”.

Many orthodox people today would say that this is the result of a millennium of darkness maintained intentionally by the Orthodox hierarchy through the use of the Slavonic language in church worship. This has been adopted as a strategy to fortify the Orthodox Church against the incursion of the West. This “strategy” not only kept the Romanians in spiritual ignorance and in the practice of mere rituals, but it also hindered the development of the national language and writing until the first half of the sixteenth century. This is a subject which has received

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, *op. cit.* p. 68. For individual cases of persecution of various orthodox priests, monks, monasteries and information about those who informed the Securitate about them see the well documented material by Carmen Chivu-Duță, *Culte din România între prigonire și colaborare* [The cults of Romania between persecution and collaboration] (Iași: Polirom, 2007), pp.29-77.

<sup>12</sup> Lucian Boia, *Suveranii României. Moharhia, o soluție?* [The sovereigns of Romania. The monarchy, a solution?] (București: Humanitas, 2014), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Ton *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual], *op. cit.* p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, *op. cit.* p. 5.

much attention from scholars and one to which we shall direct our attention in what follows. (It is the time of deacon Coresi.)<sup>15</sup>

The first half of the sixteenth century brought major changes to the European religious scene. Protestant Reformers such as Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in Geneva and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, called for a return to apostolic, New Testament Christianity. Reformation thought was also brought to Moldavia and Transylvania, two of the provinces of what would become Romania later on, largely by German settlers who emigrated eastward due to Catholic persecution. Most of the Germanic population of Transylvania were Lutherans. A large part of the Székely population (The Turkish population assimilated by Hungarian tribes) became Calvinists, while many of the rich Hungarian people remained Catholics. The Romanian population was largely orthodox. But the orthodox Romanians during this time were tacitly tolerated until later in 1780s when the Hapsburgs realized that they could use them as allies against the Protestants.<sup>16</sup> These four religious denominations were present at this time in Transylvania and they were called *receptae* (*religions officially recognized and protected*). So, in the sixteenth century Transylvania became a land of religious toleration and liberty.

Against this background one important effect of the Reformation in the Romanian territories was the arrival of the first writings in the language of the people. At the initiative of the Reformed leaders of Transylvania, deacon Coresi became the first publisher of religious works in the Romanian language. As a result Coresi represents the first attempt to break down the orthodox blockade against the use of the Romanian language in their liturgical services. It is interesting to follow the events leading to Coresi's editorial, writing and translation work.

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<sup>15</sup> Ana Dumitran, "Reforma și Românii din Transilvania în Secolele XVI-XVII" [The Reformation and the Romanians of Transylvania in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries]. Ph. D. diss., Cluj-Napoca, 1993, pp. 47-60. It seems that Coresi had his origin in a numerous Greek family named Coressios. There are many hypotheses regarding the origin of Coresi, but the most favoured by Romanian scholars such as B. P. Hașdeu, Ar. Densușianu, A.D. Xenopol is that he descended from a Greek family from the island of Chios. After settling in Țările Române (Walachia), this Greek family took up the name Coresi without adding any other forename, as was the custom in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. Other explanations are provided by Predescu who favours the idea that the first Coressios became established in our country at the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century, around 1490. See Lucian Predescu, *Diaconul Coresi* [Deacon Coresi] (București: Bucovina, 1933), pp. 7, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Neagu Djuvara, *O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri* [A short history of the Romanians narrated for young people] (București: Humanitas, 2007), pp. 119-120.

Beginning in 1520 German merchants returning from the markets of Liepzig brought Luther's books with them to Sibiu. The effect of this book trafficking was the transformation, by 1529, of the town of Sibiu into an entirely Lutheran settlement. By 1535 all the Germanic population of Transylvania became Lutherans.<sup>17</sup> In 1544 the Germans in Transylvania adopted the Augsburg Confession of Faith and the Hungarians followed shortly after. In 1544 the leaders of Sibiu hired a man called Filip Moldoveanu to translate the Lutheran catechism into the Romanian language. It is not known exactly if the translation was made from German or from Hungarian, but we know that this is the first theological book printed in the Romanian language.<sup>18</sup> The first translation of the four gospels into Romanian was printed in Sibiu in 1552.<sup>19</sup> Calvinism began to be spread in the Hungarian communities as well. The town of Debrecen in Hungary, also called "Little Geneva", became the center of Calvinism in Eastern Europe. The second centre of Calvinism was in Romania in the town of Cluj-Napoca, although it was soon to be moved to Braşov, the town where Coresi started his printing ministry.

The indisputable value of Coresi was not that he was or he wasn't of Romanian origin, but that he felt he was a Romanian and he contributed immensely to the development of printing and of the literary Romanian language. He printed religious books at the order of town mayors, rulers and metropolitans, nobles and bishops in Transylvania. His publications, in great part produced at Braşov between 1556 and 1583, are true monuments of the old Romanian language.<sup>20</sup> In the introductions and prefaces that Coresi wrote, he brought into discussion for the first time the introduction of Romanian into religious worship. The

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<sup>17</sup> In Romania there are about 250 citadels and fortified churches built by the Germans in Transylvania beginning with 14<sup>th</sup> century and continuing until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They are living testimony for the life and organizing structure of the Germanic society of these times. The Germans came to Transylvania from the Western side of the Rhine and began to populate Transylvania between 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. Most of them were peasants and practiced crafts such as stone cutting, clay pottery, carpentry, land cultivation and animal raising. They were renowned for their excellent organization, discipline and diligence.

<sup>18</sup> Iosif Ţon mentions this in "Întroducerea la ediția în limba română" [Introduction to the Romanian edition] of the translation in the Romanian language of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Cf Jean Calvin, *Învățătura Religiei Creștine* Vol. 1, trad. Daniel Tomuleț, Elena Jorj (Oradea: Editura Cartea Creștină, 2003), p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Between 1551 and 1553 the work entitled *Tetraevanghelul slavo-român* was published at Sibiu. See Ion Gheție, Alexandru Mareş, *Diaconul Coresi și izbânda scrisului în limba română*, [Deacon Coresi and the success of writing in the Romanian language] (București, Editua Minerva, 1994), p. 76.

<sup>20</sup> The list of Coresi's works is found in D. R. Mazilu, *Diaconul Coresi* [Deacon Coresi] (Ploiești: Cartea Românească, 1933), p. 8ff.

language used in his works was the one spoken in Țara Românească (or Walachia), in the south-east part of Transylvania, and formed the basis for the formation of the literary Romanian language. He sensed that the Romanians felt the need for a literary Romanian language which could help them understand and plumb the depths of their faith.

The earliest efforts of publishing the Bible in Romanian occurred in 1582 with the printing in the small town of Orăștie of the so-called *Palia de la Orăștie*. This document was printed by Șerban Coresi (the son of Deacon Coresi <http://www.answers.com/topic/coresi>) and Marian Diacul and was the first partial translation of the Old Testament in the Romanian language. This translation was a direct result of the Protestant Reformation and it was supported financially by a few reformed nobles, Romanian as well as Hungarians. The entire Bible was not published in Romanian until the end of the 17th century, when monks at the monastery of Snagov, near Bucharest, translated and printed *Biblia de la București* (The Bucharest Bible) in 1688. But *Palia* remains the most important Bible translation, because it made a break with the church language and ritual of the Romanians, replacing the Slavonic tradition with the Latin one. Under the influence of the Protestant Reformation the Romanian church switched from the use of Byzantine worship in the Slavonic language to a liturgy performed in the Romanian language. The actual transition, however, from the Chirilic letters to Latin letters happened much later in 1863.<sup>21</sup> Before that time we wrote like the Bulgarians, Serbians or the Russians which gave the west the impression that we were a nation from another family than the neolatin one.

As Romanians, however, we embraced the Reformation which was spreading through the whole of Europe. Calvinism had a great influence on Coresi and on the Romanians located in Transylvania and the most important contribution of Coresi's printing and editorial ministry was the introduction of the liturgy in the Romanian language not only in the reformed churches, but also in the orthodox ones.

Romanian communities of Calvinist faith continued to exist in Transylvania, but they began to be opposed by both the Orthodox and Catholics. After the settlement in Transylvania of the Habsburg regime (1699-1918), the Romanian Protestant communities disappeared, gradually joining the Greek-Catholic or the Hungarian Reformed communities. It was a regime gradually imposed in

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<sup>21</sup> Djuvara, *op. cit.* p. 199.

Transylvania by the Austrian Empire. The arrival of the Austrians in Transylvania took place in the context of their offensive against the Ottoman Empire, especially following the Ottoman's failure to occupy Vienna in 1683. The Ottoman army was backed up by the rulers of Walachia and Moldova, Serban Cantacuzino and Gheorghe Duca. In 1699 after sixteen years of Austrian offensive against the Turks, to whom the Polish and Venetian armies, and later the Russians, allied themselves, the peace of Karlowitz brought dire consequences for the Turks. Besides all the territories retained by Poland, Venice and Russia, the Austrians kept for themselves the whole of Hungary, Slovenia, a part of Croatia and Serbia and the whole of Transylvania. After 1690 the "master" of Transylvania began to rule from Vienna. King Leopold, who was a hardcore Catholic militant, thought that the best thing for Transylvania - where the majority were Protestants grouped under three denominations: Calvinists, Lutherans and Unitarians - was to bring the Romanian Orthodox believers in Transylvania under the rule of the pope. It all happened after three years of hard negotiation with the metropolitan Atanasie who, in 1701, accepted the points of the 1439 Union of Florence on condition that the orthodox clergy would receive the same privileges as those of the catholic clergy. The Jesuits played an important role in the negotiations. At the beginning the whole Orthodox Church in Transylvania adhered to the *uniates* (Greek-Catholics). As the years passed it became obvious that the Habsburgs were not keeping their promises. A few years later, in 1711, under the insistence of their orthodox brothers in Moldova and Țara Românească, and the mission of the Russian church, more than half the Orthodox Church in Transylvania returned to Orthodoxy. To stop this return the authorities responded with unbelievable brutality.<sup>22</sup>

This union between the Orthodox Church and Rome had its own benefits despite the fearful pressures encountered in the process. The church was allowed to send young men to Rome and Vienna to be trained for the priesthood. In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century they returned to Romania and brought with them the first cultural elements which would westernize the Romanian principalities. The first scholarly Romanians who would write history and produce grammar, literature and studies about the Romanian language were former Romanian Greek-Orthodox students who had studied in Rome and in other western centres of study.

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<sup>22</sup> Djuvara, *op. cit.* pp.136-137.

Life for the peasant population, whether under the Orthodox Church or under the Greek-Catholic church, was extremely difficult. By the end of the eighteenth century there was an intellectual class in both churches, Orthodox and Greek-Catholic that sent petitions to Vienna demanding greater liberties and equalities for the Romanians in Transylvania. Possibly influenced by the French Revolution a renowned petition known as *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* was sent to Vienna in 1791 on behalf of the Romanians in Ardeal (Transylvania) in clearly expressed and well-argued claims. The result was minimal: something changed but not much. Gradually the Greek-Catholic priests received equal rights with the Protestants and Catholics. More and more schools were opened, and more and more young people went to study in the west.

In the meantime, due to the fierce persecution of the Anabaptists in Western Europe during the sixteenth century, groups of these believers spread towards Central and Eastern Europe, reaching the two provinces of Romania: Transylvania and Walachia. But additional intense persecution from the Habsburgs and the opposition of the Jesuits meant that, after 1767, the Anabaptists were no longer to be found in Transylvania. About the same time, two of the Principalities of Romania (Moldova and Walachia) entered the so-called “Phanariot era” (1711-1821). This was the time when the Ottoman Porte began to nominate Greek princes from Phanar, a district of Constantinople, outside the walls of the town, to rule the two principalities of Romania. The administration, the church and the culture were controlled in these two principalities by Greek nobles from Constantinople who ruled from Bucharest and Iasi. The Greek influence had a negative effect on the Romanian people. Under their leadership they intended to establish a Greek Christian kingdom in all the orthodox nations around them. Being fiercely proud of their Byzantine past they had a superiority complex towards all the neighboring nations, including the Romanians, and had no regard for the local interests, thinking that they alone were called to rule all the orthodox nations. Just like the Slavonic language, the Greek language and their religious culture had a darkening effect upon the people of Romania.

When the Phanariot era ended in 1821, Romania went through a series of events starting with the revolution of 1848, then the union of the first two Principalities of Moldova and Țara Românească in 1859, and eventually the independence from foreign domination in 1877-1878, followed, in 1918, by the Great Union of all three Principalities of Moldova, Țara Românească and Transylvania into one single nation state.

The decade when Romania achieved independence began with the overthrow of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1866 and the installation of Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen as the new prince and later King Charles I (1866-1914). Most of the political class of the time believed that, having had so many military conflicts in the past, Romania would not be able to achieve the status of a truly free and independent country, truly western in its orientation, unless it had a foreign ruler. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1866 Charles, a foreign sovereign - distant relative of the King of Prussia and closer relative of the King of France, Napoleon III - was brought to the country in secrecy for fear of the Austrians. From then onwards the development of Romania was to be based, in large part, on Western models.<sup>23</sup>

Once independence was achieved, the Romanian Orthodox Church began to experience a time of profound transformation. The State began to dominate the Church, offering it new conditions for the development of its theological training and state salaries for its priesthood. These benefits led to a docile subservience of the Church to the State and its political interests. In a short time, the Orthodox Church became a national institution with a powerful influence over the masses, particularly in the countryside, where development in all aspects of life was very slow. Nevertheless, the failure of the church to maintain high moral standards among the people and the increased decadence which became visible in the leadership of the Orthodox Church precipitated unprecedented revival movements within Romanian Orthodoxy known as the Tudorist movement in Țara Românească (today known as the Brethren Church) and the Lord's Army in Transylvania. In addition, the increased influence from Western Europe in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about the formation of other religious evangelical movements in Romania. Among these movements the Baptists were about to become the most energetic in their endeavour to spread their Christian faith.

## THE BAPTIST MOVEMENT IN ROMANIA

Baptist beginnings in Romania are indisputably associated with the early German Baptists. The Baptist movement sprang from three main regions of the country: south, south-east and the western part. In April 1856 a man called Karl Johann Scharschmidt, with his wife Augusta, came to Bucharest, in Țara Românească (Wallachia), and found work there among his countrymen from Germany. This southern region of the country went through a period of

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<sup>23</sup> Djuvara, *op. cit.* p. 204.

agricultural and industrial development. Thousands of mills, factories and workshops were established everywhere, creating economic opportunities which attracted many workers and craftsmen of German origin. Johann Scharschmidt was one of the carpenters baptized in Hamburg by Oncken in 1845. He moved from Hamburg to Hungary, where he was deeply involved in Baptist witness, and from Hungary Johann and his wife came to Bucharest becoming the first Baptists to settle in the capital city of Romania. He and his wife, they seem to have had no children, lived in Bucharest for 10 years and then moved in 1866 to Iasi, a town in the north east part of Romania. His nomadic spirit was used by God, says the Romanian historian Popovici, to bring the Baptist faith to our country. The couple was friendly and communicative, full of love for those around them, extremely interested to see others coming to faith and enthusiastic to preach the good news of the Gospel. From Oncken and Lehmann they had taken the well-known motto “every Baptist a missionary” and constantly put that into practice in their lives. Three years after they moved to Bucharest Johann and Augusta were printing and distributing thousands of leaflets and tracts. Although Johann did not consider himself a preacher, the Romanian Baptist Church remembers him as an efficient literature distributor and a very gifted person-to-person evangelist. When the work of the church in Bucharest grew Johann sent word to the church in Hamburg asking Oncken for help and in 1863 Oncken sent August Liebig to take over the pastoral ministry of the church.

Baptist witness spread from Bucharest among the Germans in Cataloi, a small village in the north of Tulcea, in the larger region of Dobrogea, the south-east part of Romania. Once again Oncken stepped in to organize the ministry in that area and asked Liebig to move from Bucharest to Cataloi. The Bucharest church decided against Oncken’s instruction and for a year Liebig was unable to move from Bucharest. Eventually, in 1867, after much talk the insistence of the brothers in Cataloi prevailed and Liebig was allowed to go there on condition that he would continue to help resolve pastoral issues in Bucharest.

The church decided that in the absence of Liebig’s preaching they would read one of Spurgeon’s printed sermons every Sunday morning during worship.<sup>24</sup> At the same time a Bible depot was opened in Bucharest by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) and its strategic ministry being overseen in Vienna where the British-born Edward Millard was acting as BFBS’s representative. From the

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<sup>24</sup> Details in Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 17-28. Cf. Randall, *Communities of Conviction*, pp. 147-158.

very beginning missionary work, personal evangelism and the distribution of Bibles and tracts became the emblem of the Baptists in Romania.

In the absence of a pastor the church in Bucharest asked Millard in Vienna for help and in 1878 Millard sent Daniel Schwegler to take up the pastoral ministry of the Bucharest church which had about sixty members at the time. Besides his pastoral work in the Bucharest church, which lasted until 1886, Schwegler also managed the Bible depot. During his ministry a young man named Johann Hammerschmidt from Hagenbeck, near Hamburg, arrived in Bucharest with a cargo of animals and reptiles dispatched for the government minister Câmpeanu and stayed there to care for these animals. He was converted and was baptized in 1883.

In 1891, because no one else was there to do it, Hammerschmidt stepped up into the pulpit and preached to the church. From that moment he fulfilled a preaching ministry whenever it was needed. In 1903 he was called to pastor the church and he continued to do so until 1910 when he took up the pastoral work of the church in Posen.

It was during his ministry that the first ethnic Romanians were baptized in the Bucharest church. The first Romanians to be received as members in the German Bucharest church in 1896 were Ștefan Pîrvu and Nicolae Manole. During Hammerschmidt's pastoral ministry a third young Romanian, a pharmacist, was baptized in Bucharest in 1902. His name was Constantin Adorian. Because of his excellent knowledge of the German language he was able to study theology in the Hamburg Baptist seminary and soon became a vital instrument in the hands of the German church in Bucharest to spread the Baptist witness among the Romanian population.

The influence of the German ministers on the Romanian nominally orthodox population was soon noticed by the city authorities in Bucharest. They began to show concern and to treat this as a challenge to the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In 1900 the city authorities told the leaders of the German church in Bucharest to focus their ministry only upon the Germans, and threatened to punish their pastor and the members of the church if they did not comply. Such a threat could only speed up the events which led in 1912 to the ordination of Adorian as pastor of the growing Romanian-speaking Baptist church in Bucharest. When Transylvania became part of the Romanian Kingdom in 1919, there were about 21,000 Baptist believers in Romania. By then the Germans were but a small proportion of the total Baptist community.

A Romanian Baptist Union was formed, which was and is one of the largest Unions in Europe.

But the most powerful witness of Baptist faith was about to be experienced in the third region of the country, the north-west part of Romania. One of the richest parts of Transylvania was the region called Crişana and within this region the Bihor County played a significant role in the development of Baptist faith in Transylvania. Hungarian and German Baptist evangelists formed Baptist groups in the Cluj and Bihor counties, initially among their own nationalities. In 1848 the Hungarians proclaimed the union of Transylvania with Hungary. The Romanians could not accept this and allied with the central government in Vienna against the Hungarian revolutionaries. Twenty years later, in 1867, the Austro-Hungarian dualism was created and Hungary, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, received authority over Transylvania. This state of affairs lasted until 1919 when the Treaty of Trianon was signed and Transylvania returned to be part of the Romanian Kingdom.

The beginnings of the Baptist movement in the Austro-Hungarian Empire can be traced to two independent groups: a group of Austrian and Hungarian carpenters who were converted in Hamburg in the 1840s and British itinerant booksellers who came to Hungary and Transylvania in the 1870s. The Baptist faith arrived in Bihor County in 1871, brought by a Bible distributor named Anton Novak, a German from Vienna who was employed by the BFBS to distribute Bibles in Hungary and Transylvania.<sup>25</sup> Novak arrived in the small town of Salonta Mare where he found a group of Bible loving people who belonged to the Hungarian Reformed Church but were dissatisfied with the spiritual state of their church. Novak's ministry focused on the study and interpretation of the Bible. This led to the formation of the first Baptist church in Salonta Mare which became instrumental in the spread of the Baptist faith in the whole of Transylvania. Other groups of Baptists were formed in Arad, Cluj and Braşov. A dominant figure in the development of the Baptist faith in this area was Henrich Meyer, another German sent by Oncken to ministry in Austro-Hungary and Transylvania. In 1875 Mayer baptized important key figures in the life of the church in Salonta, one of them being a man called Mihaly Kornya. A new religious movement started from the ground, through the simple desire to live out faithfully the Word of the Bible in their lives. The church in Salonta

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<sup>25</sup> Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 29-30.

displayed great missionary zeal, great dedication and was led by a spirit of sacrifice.

Due to their religious background, most of those Hungarian Baptists were of Calvinist convictions. They constantly stressed divine election, predestination and the need for firm church discipline. Mihaly Kornya became the greatest Reformed Baptist evangelist of Transylvania. In his sermons Kornya often used the expression “those elected by the Lord” and when he discussed with his friends about the salvation of others he used to say: “if they are elected by the Lord, they will repent”.<sup>26</sup> Due to his Calvinist convictions Kornya was extremely strict in his church discipline, knowing that those who are saved, even if sternly treated for their backsliding, will not lose their salvation. He died in 1917 and it is recorded that he baptized over eight thousand converts in Transylvania, both Hungarians and a great number of Romanians. As an evangelist and church planter Kornya seems to be unequalled by any other in the history of evangelical life in Romania.<sup>27</sup>

During the First World War the Hungarian and German Baptists continued to influence the Romanian-speaking Baptist churches. The early Baptist communities among the Romanians were like a family gathering, in which the participants would read the Bible, pray and sing Christian hymns. For more than a century and a half this continued to be the strategy throughout Romania for planting new Baptist churches. By 1920 a core of young Romanian Baptists were pioneering the Baptist Church throughout the whole country of Romania.

Those dedicated to spread the teaching of the Bible were pouring down the richness of their soul through their preaching. They were courageous missionaries and knew how to seize every opportunity to sow the teaching of the Bible in the hearts of those who were opened to receive it. Most of those preachers were simple people with little education.

#### CHRISTIAN LITERATURE AMONG THE BAPTISTS IN ROMANIA

But the thing which defined the Baptists in Romania most clearly right from the beginning was their zeal to see the Bible distributed in great numbers. Often the pioneers of the Baptist faith in the villages and towns were Bible distributors. Putting the Bible in people’s hands arose from the conviction that faith must be founded on and nourished by the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New

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<sup>26</sup> Popovici, *op. cit.* p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> Kornya’s ministry is described with interesting details by Randall, *Communities of Conviction*, pp. 137-146 and Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 33-36.

Testament. In their view every Baptist believer needed to read and to know well the Old and New Testament.

Whenever the Baptists went, they encouraged people to get involved in programs of Bible reading. To most of the people the Bible came with a message unknown to them before and reading the Bible led to the conversion of many people. They compared the Christian life they had with the Christian life described in the New Testament and realized that they did not have that life. This is the testimony of the Romanian Bible translator Cornilescu, who, in order to see this *new life* coming in the midst of his people, decided in the 1920's to start producing a new version of the Bible in Romanian.<sup>28</sup>

Although most Romanian Baptist pastors had not had intense theological training, there were some among them with a strong desire for the publication of Christian magazines containing devotional articles, Christian news, studies and commentaries. The first Baptist magazine was entitled *Adevărul* (The Truth) issued for the first time on 1st January 1900. The magazine was published monthly through the publishing house of the Baptist Association in Curtici and was edited by Gheorghe Şimonca, a law student, assisted by another believer named Gheorghe Crişan.<sup>29</sup> This magazine was followed by various other Christian magazines, edited and published in different towns in the western part of Romania.

Another magazine is worth mentioning. *Lumina Lumii* (The Light of the World) was first published in 1904 in Arad under the editorial care of Gheorghe Slăv, a skillful writer with great zeal and an excellent knowledge of the Bible. For each issue Slăv chose to translate one of Spurgeon's sermons from German or Hungarian which took about eight pages of the magazine. Another eight pages were given to short articles, news and topics related to faith. Through the publication of Spurgeon's sermons this magazine contributed to the development of the preaching skills of the pastors. As they read them each month and saw how Spurgeon made the transition from the Bible text to his sermon, how he organized his arguments, used his illustrations and applied the teachings of the Bible to every day Christian life, the pastors learned much about the technique of sermon preparation. These published sermons also gave them

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<sup>28</sup> Dumitru Cornilescu, *Cum m-am întors la Dumnezeu* [How did I return to God], Bucureşti, Biserica Evanghelică Română, p. 6. See also *Cornilescu: din culisele publicării celei mai citite traduceri a Sfintei Scripturi* [Cornilescu: the background to the publication of one of the most read translations of the Holy Scripture], ed. Emanuel Conţac, (Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint and Logos, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Popovici, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

a rich source of knowledge and stimulated their zeal by unfolding to them the richness of the doctrines of grace. This magazine was like heavenly manna for the newly founded churches. As in Bucharest so in other smaller churches where they did not have a pastor: the reading of Spurgeon's published sermons from the pulpit was feeding a church that hungered for the truth.<sup>30</sup>

Even before the First World War, due to the rapid growth and progress of their work, the Baptist churches were always in need of Bibles and hymn books. This need for Bibles and hymn books never diminished. During the war no hymn books were printed. After the war the need became even greater. Other Christian literature was seriously scarce before the war and after the war this became almost nonexistent. Pastors were overstretched with their pastoral duties and the preaching of the Word and were overwhelmed by the great number of churches they had to care for. Also, very few of them were sufficiently trained theologically and linguistically to attempt writing books.

When translation of other foreign theological works came up for discussion, the churches had to face the reality that they were too poor to raise funds for the translation and publication of these books. At the first Baptist Congress, held in 1920, Pastor Mihai Vicaș spoke about the acute need of churches for literature and translated works. The minutes of the Congress show that the appeal of this pastor caused the leaders present to determine to set up a fund for Christian literature.<sup>31</sup> But from then on all the good intentions to stimulate creative activity and enrich our heritage of Christian literature have been up against difficult times, hindrances and persecutions, and a continuous discouragement of all those who might have given themselves to writing and translation. For decades to come the Baptists in Romania would suffer a serious lack of Christian literature.

For much of the second half of the 20th century Romania was part of the Soviet sphere of influence. Due to a climate of permanent harassment and continuous crushing of creative forces, there was hardly any development of Christian education<sup>32</sup> and literature in Romania. Because all the energies of those capable

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<sup>30</sup> For other works published by Slāv see Popovici, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-212.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed list of all the books, magazines and translation works published in Romania between 1920 and 1941 see Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 319-321.

<sup>32</sup> After 1920 the Southern Baptist Convention, USA, agreed to provide funds for the development of a theological seminary in Bucharest, and in 1923 a large seminary building was erected consisting of a number of classrooms, a dormitory and several apartments. Few other Bible courses were organized for lay preachers in Bucharest or in other Baptist centres in the western part of the country.

to write and translate were focused on the fight for religious freedom, from then on we have a very poor inventory of Christian literature and education in Romania. We can only speculate how the work of the Gospel might have progressed in a context of religious freedom. It may be that if there had been ample development of Christian education and literature, accompanied by catechizing, educating the members of the churches and arming them with powerful doctrinal knowledge, the country would have had well-equipped churches with well-trained leaders and ministries. Instead, the dark times which engulfed Romania and the evangelical churches led to the virtual disappearance of any attempt to promote these vital ministries. True Christian education survived in Bucharest, though it gave the churches a reduced number of pastors every four years. Personal witnesses, person-to-person evangelism and the missionary endeavors were the only ministries which could not be taken from the churches.

From the moment that the communist power legitimized itself in Romania in 1946, the Baptists and the other Evangelical movements in Romania had to live their faith under constant pressures. The Orthodox Church was always pushing for great opposition against them, and the communist power was always pressing down upon them to make them comply and compromise. In the official bureaucracy of the communist party after the Second World War, the specific terminology used to describe these evangelical movements, or religious minorities as they were often called, was “cults”, “sects” or “anarchical groups”. The communist regime acted violently against them, arresting many leaders and imposing many administrative punishments.

Even though it is now over thirty years since communism collapsed in 1989, the Orthodox Church in general refuses a constructive dialogue with, or official recognition of, the evangelical movements, while it itself has to deal with its own recent past with thousands of shameful compromises, even corruption, preferring to find refuge in an infantile arrogance grafted into a totally non-Christian nationalism.

The Roman-Catholics in Romania accept the position of “a second rank” in the Romanian religious hierarchy. Though they were considered a tolerated religion their intellectual elite was all but destroyed. Many clergy, hierarchs and monks were involved in the process which indicted them for high treason and espionage, and the pronounced punishments meant many years of detention.

After half a century under great pressure, the Greek-Catholics of Romania, known as The Romanian Uniate Church, continued to be ignored, sometimes

even disdained, by the Romanian authorities. This is the Church which was legally suppressed by the communist regime through the Decree no. 358 of 1<sup>st</sup> December 1948, whose ecclesiastical elite (bishops, priests, teachers, and archbishops) were almost all thrown into the communist prisons. Following the Soviet model in Ukraine two years before, from September – October 1948, the priests were put under incredible pressure, physically and morally, to cross over to orthodoxy. A significant number joined the Orthodox Church, but many remained within the “resistance” and a good number of those who joined later retracted.<sup>33</sup> There is a strong feeling today that when the phase of direct “legal” martyrdom ended in December 1989, the Romanian State and the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) seem to have agreed to continue their common front against the Greek-Catholic Church, continuing with a phase of psychological martyrdom.<sup>34</sup>

There is still tremendous pressure to be affiliated with the Orthodox Church: from family and friends, from tradition, and from politics. Culturally, one needs to be Orthodox to be considered a good Romanian. The Orthodox Church is campaigning continuously to be the official national church. Thus, those who have been in the Orthodox tradition tend to remain Orthodox. The Orthodox Church is generally opposed to the evangelical efforts to share the gospel in Romania. Orthodox priests are particularly engaged in leading the opposition and at times this comes to physical conflict. Orthodox publications and preaching are against the “proselytizers,” who are accused of “stealing the sheep” out of the true fold.

Despite all the above difficulties, the fall of communism in 1989 gave a sudden freedom to all the evangelical churches which began to experience a revived activity. A new era for the rebirth and development of the Baptist faith and its Christian education began in Romania. Some results included a marked increase in publications and the advent of private schools. In 1990, Emanuel Baptist Church in Oradea, one of the largest Baptist Churches in Europe, established its own Baptist Theological education. It developed its own nursery school and all the grades leading up to a well appreciated Baptist High school. The

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Raportul Tismăneanu [Tismăneanu Report], [http : //www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT\\_FINAL\\_CADR.pdf](http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CADR.pdf), pp. 70-71 quoted by Carmen Chivu-Duță, *Culte din România între prigonire și colaborare* [The cults from Romania between persecution and collaboration] *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>34</sup> Cristian Bădiliță and Otniel Vereș, *Biserici, Secte, Erezii: Dialoguri fără prejudecăți despre marile tradiții creștine* [Churches, Sects, Heresies: Dialogues without prejudices about the great Christian traditions], (București: Vremea, 2011), pp. 5-6.

underground theological school, known as “The School of the Prophets”, was reorganized as an accredited theological Baptist Institute. Emanuel Church extended its vision and moved towards developing this Institute into a Baptist University. Since its foundation Emanuel University functions under the authority of Emmanuel Baptist Church and offers academic programs in theology, languages, music and management.

Soon after Emanuel University was established, “The School of the Prophets” recommenced. The history of this school goes back to 1985 when Slavic Gospel Association, UK, responded to the call of Emanuel church to help train people for the ministry. Before the fall of communism the school was held in secret, often in the woods and mountains, for fear of detection by the authorities. When freedom came it could be openly promoted as part of the church’s ministry. It continued to be a training ground for leaders and workers in Romanian churches, most of these situated in rural places. Their two-year evening course aims at equipping laymen for the ministry.

After 1989 the importance of Christian literature resurfaced with great urgency in Romania. Făclia Publishing House<sup>35</sup>, located in the town of Oradea, in the Bihor County, is probably the only Reformed Baptist publishing house in Romania whose aim is to continue and develop the reformed beginnings of men like Kornya and Toth, whose ministry was exercised only 30 km away from where it is located.

After almost thirty years of publishing Reformed books in Romania, Faclia Publishing House has translated and published more than 300 titles. These books are used today by the pastors of the evangelical churches in Romania and the students of all the evangelical schools in the country. Faclia Publishing House continues to be committed to see that the great vacuum of academic theological books, written by committed conservative evangelical scholars, is filled.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Baptist Church from Romania enjoys great freedom today, but it also faces many challenges which demand a new generation of godly and well qualified servants, with a profound knowledge of the Bible and a comprehensive understand of present times. The society is devastated by

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<sup>35</sup>See the website [www.faclia.ro](http://www.faclia.ro). A short history of Faclia Publishing House is presented in John Birnie, *Great Oaks from Little Acorn: The Origins and Development of SGA (UK)* (Eastbourne: Slavic Gospel Association, 2010), pp. 139-147.

problems such as high divorce and abortion rates, poverty, alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, homelessness, and orphans. The freedom gained by the people in December 1989 brought with it uncertainty of what the future might bring. Unemployment continues to be high and opportunities for economic growth difficult to seize. Many Romanians, among them many evangelical believers, have immigrated to different parts of the world in search of better jobs, leaving behind them the old people in their family and churches. For the churches the unstable economy means that little money is available for funding projects to counteract these problems.

Biblical doctrine is undermined by unbiblical traditions and legalism. The churches need to find ways to better assist the new follower of Christ in facing the challenges of his or her new faith. New believers need encouragement and equipping with solid and sound biblical teaching in order to enable them to resist the temptations found in modern society.

One feature of the Baptists in Romania even today is their commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture which they treat as the basis of Christian life and devotion. The belief that each individual has a need for personal conversion through spiritual rebirth and commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is powerfully pushed forward in sermons and bible studies. One central characteristic of the Baptists in Romania is the strong awareness of the importance of spreading the good news of salvation and teaching and making disciples. Sharing the good news arises from their joy in knowing Christ and His transforming power, and from their concern to remain faithful to the command to proclaim Christ's Gospel to the whole world. Preaching has long been recognized as a key moment in Baptist worship.

But all these are under constant attack from those ready to conform the church to a more modern pattern of worship. Our churches need to deepen the knowledge of what it means to have worship that is truly God-centered. They need to learn to engage with Scripture every day and to affirm with great clarity the authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

The Baptists in Romania have now the opportunity to go into every corner of the world proclaiming the message of Christ to people of every race, nation, and language group. I am persuaded that the Romanian Baptist Church both in Romania and in the Western Romanian Diaspora is being given an opportunity unique in its history to learn to use all the means by which it can proclaim the clear and pure message of the Bible. We have the opportunity today to strengthen the Baptist witness which started in 1856 as never before.

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