

## Preface

The Baptist Union of Romania is one of the largest Baptist Unions in Europe and in recent years has become known for the quality of the younger leaders that have been nurtured within its ranks. This study, which is the result of research undertaken by Aurel Mateescu from Romania, for his MTh Dissertation at the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS), Prague, adds significantly to our knowledge of the Romanian Baptist story.

The focus here is on the persecutions and opposition faced by Baptists from their early beginnings in Romania in 1856, later into the twentieth century and through the Communist period and even, in some respects, up to the present day. An important strength of this study is the way it seeks to take into account political and historical factors as it examines the Baptist story. There have been books written on the Communist period in Eastern Europe particular which do not engage in this kind of wider analysis and so what is here is an important addition to the literature on that part of the world. Also, the post-communist period in Romania, which has brought so many dramatic changes, is dealt with here in an illuminating way.

This study also looks at the complex story of Baptist relationships with the majority Church in Romania, the Romanian Orthodox Church. At a time when there is considerable interest in Orthodox spirituality, it is understandable that there is a general reluctance to dwell on the tensions that exist between evangelicals and the Orthodox Church. However, these tensions have existed and do exist. In Romania, as the early Baptist movement spread and grew, many in the Orthodox Church saw Baptists as a sect that was seeking to draw away Orthodox believers and to undermine Romanian identity. Persecution, at times severe persecution, ensued.

A report in the 1920s, reproduced and commented upon here, spoke about Baptist pastors and preachers sent to prison where they were beaten; Baptist church members, men and women, being questioned, beaten and imprisoned; meeting-houses and chapels being closed, emptied of furniture, and left without Bibles and hymn books; armed Gendarmes entering houses of believers and insulting those present; young Baptists doing military service being singled out for harassment; school children from Baptist families being expelled from school; the bodies of deceased Baptist children being taken by police force from their parents and buried by Orthodox priests; Baptists being refused legal marriage; and their New Testaments being destroyed.

The Romanian Baptists have had many links with the wider Baptist community. For example, between the two world wars Romanian Baptists looked to the European and World Baptist communities for help in their suffering, and individuals such as J.H. Rushbrooke, a world Baptist leader with a special concern for Eastern Europe, pressed for religious freedom in Romania. T. R. Glover, the Public Orator of the University of Cambridge, was another Baptist in this period who took up the cause of Romanian Baptists. This study also deals in some detail with later Romanian leaders such as Iosif Tson, who during the Communist era was Romania's most prominent Baptist pastor and who was forced out of the country. His wider ministry was well known to evangelicals in the West. Richard Wurmbrand, although not a Baptist, was another Romanian who became a representative of evangelicals - he testified before the American Congress about what he and others suffered under Communism – and who features in this study.

Aurel Mateescu has documented the Romanian Baptist experiences of persecution with care. He has used many sources available in Romania as well as

material in English. The internal, at times very painful, difficulties that have been part of the experience of Baptists in Romania are not ignored. These episodes are probed and evaluated. This is not the kind of history that 'papers over the cracks'. On the other hand, the faithfulness of these Baptist believers is properly portrayed. This is a serious historical study and is important reading for all those concerned to understand more about the development of Baptist life in Europe.

Dr Ian M. Randall  
Senior Research Fellow  
International Baptist Theological Seminary  
Prague  
Czech Republic