

Summary

This dissertation researches the story of persecution of Romanian Baptist churches from their early beginnings in 1856 to the present day. By 'persecution' this thesis understands the condition of being mistreated physically and mentally over a period of time, especially as a result of religious beliefs. The dissertation takes into account the political and historical context, as these factors, together with Baptists' relationships with the majority church, the Romanian Orthodoxy, played an important role in Baptist life and persecution experience. As the Baptist movement, focusing its mission mostly among German speaking population, spread in its early years relatively freely in Romanian territories, the problems emerged as soon as Baptist evangelism reached the local population, the Romanians. The Orthodoxy, working closely with political powers, saw in Baptists a threat to national identity. Baptists were threatened, their work restricted, their rights limited, and there were cases of physical harassment. Between the two world wars, the situation did not improve though the Romanian government officially granted religious freedom. Unofficially, however, the persecution of minority churches, including Baptists, continued. Baptists were accused of being disloyal citizens, their views incompatible with 'Romanian soul'. In this period, Romanian Baptists got considerable support from wider European and World Baptist community. J.H. Rushbrooke, in his different capacities as a world Baptist leader, used governmental and diplomatic channels to stand for religious liberty in Romania. Paradoxically, the Communist regime after World War II eased the situation, though not for long. Communist persecution was directed towards all churches and religious communities. During these years of communist Romania, the Baptists differed in their

views regarding to what extent to cooperate with the atheistic powers. Persecution, restrictive legislation and experience of marginalization in the society caused inner tensions among Baptists themselves. New freedom of the 1990s, though it has opened many opportunities for Baptist work in the country, has not, however, solved an old tension between Orthodoxy and minority churches. The conclusion of this dissertation gives a summary of different reasons which have caused persecution of Baptists in Romania. These reasons range from national-political to theological. The persecution affected Romanian Baptist life in such a way that the tensions continue.