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A Report from Romania

By Mr Florin Motiu, Oradea, Romania

Political situation under the Communist regime

Regarding the political situation, the time of the Communist regime was a time of terror. After coming to power, after the Second World War, the Communists dissolved every other political party – there was no opposition allowed. The landlords and the political opponents were all thrown into prison. Many were killed.

Now there are many books published about the atrocities in the Communist prisons: torture, brain washing, beating to death, all kinds of humiliation. Political men, writers, philosophers, religious men, all who did not sympathize with the Communist party's ideology, or who had other viewpoints, were in prison. In a sense, our best men, from an intellectual and religious point of view, were taken and imprisoned.

I was almost 16 when the revolution came in 1989, and the Communist regime was overthrown. I grew up in a time of want. The food stores were empty, food was rationed, with a small quantity of oil, sugar, flour, etc; per month. It was a celebration for children to receive at Christmas some 4 or 5 bananas, but only if the parents were on friendly terms with a seller in a store.

Religious situation under the Communist regime

As far as religion was concerned, the policy of the state was atheism. In 1948 there started a severe persecution. The faithful pastors of all Christian denominations were thrown into prison. Maybe the best known in the USA is the case of the Lutheran pastor, Richard Wurmbrand, who was 14 and a half years in prison in Romania. Some died there.

The leaders of every Christian denomination were willing to collaborate and compromise with the Communist party. This was the case for my Baptist denomination also. The leaders of the Baptist Union were for decades compromised preachers, who were subject to the Communist party. They had to report everything to the Secret police – the Securitate. You can imagine the state of the churches. There were few faithful pastors. Many collaborated with the Communists, because of fear. Some of them had to report to the Securitate about the state and views of their church members! Today, after 20 years of freedom, there are still pastors who have not repented of their sin and have not confessed that they collaborated with the Secret police.

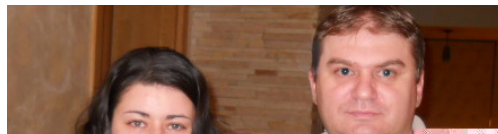
The Communist State imposed all kinds of restrictions upon the churches: they were not allowed to hold evangelistic meetings; they were not allowed to baptize any but those who were members of Baptist families (no one from any other religion or denomination who had been converted); there were all kinds of discouragements to work with the young people.

As I said before, there were all kinds of interdictions – and many pastors accepted them because of fear. Some of them were forced to emigrate to the Western world. Others dreamed of doing so and were happy to do so when opportunity came – but in this way they abandoned their flock. They found liberty, but the flock remained under persecution and without leaders.

There were examples of pastors who suffered for their faith and who were an inspiration for the flock. But also there were those who compromised and who, by their examples, taught the flock to live in a way so as to avoid suffering. Some pastors were so naïve as to convince themselves that, even if they accepted everything the Communists asked from them, they still could do things for God!

At the same time, evangelical Christians had no right to serve in the army or police, or to hold political functions, they were not allowed to work in the educational system. Young people from evangelical families were not allowed to enter University studies.

There were not enough Bibles in the country and there was very little Christian literature. The people did not think theologically. The Baptist Seminary in Bucharest had the right to train only four students for the ministry every four years! Many preachers were without theological training and discernment. They were all Arminian in theology. Only after 1990 came the possibility of reading books or of listening to sermons about



Florin Motiu and his wife Rodica



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the Doctrines of Grace and the Reformation, the Reformed doctrine.

In 1973-76 there was a revival in the Baptist church in my city, Oradea, under the preaching of Liviu Olah. He was a man of prayer. He preached about the need for repentance amongst the "repenters", as we were known here. The church was in a carnal state at that period; many Baptists had great problems with alcohol. But then there came repentance in the church. And after that, many from the world came to Christ, to the great distress of the Communists. Hundreds of persons were baptized in those years. The services in the church were characterized by solemnity and by the fear of God before 1990. God was looked upon with reverence.

To give you an idea of this, I will tell you what happened after the fall of the Communist regime, when a lot of American preachers came to our churches, some to help, others to see our churches, where revival had happened.

We, Romanian evangelical Christians were never used to mentioning the name of our Lord simply as "Jesus". We always said: Lord Jesus, or Lord Jesus Christ. So, when American preachers came and preached with a hand or both hands in their pockets, repeating "Jesus, Jesus", it was considered by us an irreverent thing. We trusted not the godliness of such preachers. It was a shock. Here nobody dared to stand before God and preach with his hands in his pockets, as when talking with a friend!

Religious situation after 1990

After the fall of Communism there was great optimism: there was liberty of preaching; there were evangelistic campaigns in stadiums; theological schools were started; we had religious programs on Radio and TV. But after that there soon started a decline. The zeal of the people weakened. Many Christians here are now interested in worldly things, in getting money, in houses, cars, jobs – things which they couldn't afford for themselves in the past. Christians now have no time nor interest in serving the Lord. There are pastors who are not zealous for God and who are preaching a superficial Gospel. The invitation system, the stress put on decisional regeneration, on choosing Christ – has marked the churches with a false view of salvation and Christian living. I must tell you this that it is a sad thing that there are many preachers coming from USA, who are preaching in our churches a false salvation. I have heard preachers preaching about a subject from the Bible, without mentioning sin, hell, condemnation, or the wrath of God – but at the end of the sermon making an invitation to people to come to Christ. Or they preach about coming to Christ in order to have a fulfilled life, a happy life, to be received in heaven and so on.

I think many in our churches, who made this kind of decision and were baptized, are not truly saved. They were taught to make decisions which can be made in the power of the unregenerate nature of man. An unregenerate man can do a physical act, raise a hand or stand up, or promise under emotional manipulation that he will change his life. But the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is not preached.

There is no stressing or mention of the doctrine of justification by faith in evangelistic sermons in our churches, nor in the teaching given to the church. The doctrine of regeneration is mentioned but the doctrine of justification is not preached in the majority of our churches.

There is another problem in our churches. You see, for 45 years, the enemy was Communism and atheism. The preacher had to seek and preach arguments against atheism. The problem is that, after 20 years of freedom, some preachers remained focused on atheism and preaching against an enemy who is not here!

Now the philosophical and religious environment has changed. We are bombarded with Oriental religion, we have many books about that, with all kinds of Oriental teachings and practices.

There is a hunger for the paranormal. And we have witchcraft. So our enemy is changed. And the preachers and the churches are not equipped to respond to these teachings. They are not familiar with understanding them. The problem is that when somebody tries to evangelize, he supposes that the other man is an atheist, but he will speak about Yoga, and reincarnation, and karma, and these Oriental teachings, so you cannot give an answer. We need very much people who can teach our people to know how to answer these teachings and how to evangelize in a pluralistic world. The changes here were too rapid. We are not recovering after these sudden and dramatic changes.

Eastern Orthodox

Until now I have spoken only about the state of evangelical Christians here. I think this may give you the impression that Romania is a Protestant nation and the problems are with non-evangelicals, with Arminian-



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ism and false teaching.

The reality is that in Romania almost 90% of the population is Eastern Orthodox. So we Baptists are a small minority. Eastern Orthodoxy is the religion of the great majority of the people and the Orthodox Church desires to be the national church. The Eastern Orthodox religion is full of ignorance regarding the Bible and full, absolutely full, of superstition. They pray to the saints and to Mary. People believe in the power of holy water to keep you from the devil. The people are taught to keep many, many saints' days, to fast at different times of the year; not total fasting, but to abstain from some food. There is no problem if they swear or get drunk on these days! Great abomination and hysteria take place on certain feast days, when the people are allowed to see, kiss and pray at the relics of some of their saints. They kiss bones, and pray there, believing their sins are forgiven. There are tens of thousands staying for hours in a line to wait for their turn.

To convert to another religion, to the Baptists, let's say, means for them and for the family abandoning the religion of their forefathers, the tradition of the nation. It is to become a second-class Romanian, fooled by Westerners.

My testimony

I was saved by God in an Arminian church like those I have described. By the way, I was saved through listening to a sermon preached in 1990 by an American preacher – I do not know his name!

I was afraid for years that I could lose my salvation and, after a failure in spiritual life, I believed for some months that I had lost my salvation. I was in a terrible condition. I had no one to tell me about assurance of salvation, even though I was already a student at a Theological Seminary, studying theology and Romanian literature and grammar.

It was interesting that I discovered then the audio tapes of John MacArthur – hundreds of them – the sermons on Matthew, Acts and Romans. I started listening to them and I heard for the first time a new kind of Bible presentation. I discovered that there is something like assurance of salvation. It was for me like a second beginning! I learned many things from this preacher. I listened to his sermons with a pencil in my hand - 450 sermons over some years. I became very attached to him.

Because of this, it was a very sad thing for me to learn about his recent activities in the "Heart of the Matter" radio program about the New Calvinists and that he shares the views of liberal theologians on Mark 16:9-20 and thinks that this is not part of the Bible.

In 1999 I started to read Martyn Lloyd-Jones' series on Ephesians, 7 volumes of 8. I heard for the first time about the Doctrines of grace. It was a wonderful discovery! Martyn Lloyd-Jones led me to the Puritans and to John Calvin. I started to read John Owen, John Flavel, Thomas Brooks and Calvin's Institutes. I accepted at first as biblical four points of Calvinism. I had to struggle some years with limited atonement or particular redemption, but after a while I was convinced that this is the teaching of the Bible and that the five points of Calvinism are interrelated. There is no four point Calvinism. If somebody affirms that he is a one point Calvinist, he does not understand the connection between the five points.

Now there was a problem. I heard of nobody in my country who believed such doctrines! I was happy! My faith in God has been straightened. I found my pleasure in having such a glorious God and such a glorious salvation. We started a Bible study group with some young men and I started to tell them about my discoveries, about the Doctrines of Grace, about Calvin, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, about the Puritans. This was new for them also. After a while we studied the five points of Calvinism.

In 2003 we started a new Bible study group, which is still in existence today, by the grace of God. We called it with a Hebrew name, "Beth ha-midrash", "The house of learning". With the passing of years, it became more and more concentrated on Reformed theology. We studied texts of the Bible, but also themes from Church History (reformation, revivals, the life and activity of Jonathan Edwards, Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones) and theological themes.

I started to observe that Christian Publishing Houses in Romania were publishing heretical books such as Steve Chalke's The Lost Message of Jesus, and a book by N. T. Wright, who holds to the false 'New Perspective on Paul'.

There are coming into Romania views like 'The Emergent Church' and 'Open Theism'. A renowned Baptist preacher here teaches a form of Pelagianism. So I wrote articles in which I refuted these errors. We studied them at our group. We have a website and we post there these articles and my audio sermons.

For years we had meetings with our group twice a month, on Tuesdays. Last year, after some years of prayer,



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we decided to have meetings on Sundays also, twice a month. On the first and third Sunday of the month we gather for prayer and preaching.

Hunger

There is a hunger for the pure Word of God and for tough theology in our churches. For example, four young people, with a Pentecostal background, from another city, came twice this year to our Sunday meetings, travelling 120 km to be with us at the preaching of God's Word and for fellowship. They did not come to see or know a man, but for the Word of God. To travel 120 km to listen to the Word of God and after that to go back 120 km – this means God has put a burden in their hearts!

A great blessing for me was when I discovered in 2007 the SermonAudio website. From that time, I listened to hundreds of sermons and lectures. I learned a lot; I found inspiration. I found people who believed in the same doctrines as I did, I found preachers who are living and preaching now the same doctrines as I preached.

You see, I thought in myself: OK, there are these people about whom I am reading: a Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and so on – but I knew no one living today, who believes these things. I do not know churches which believe and live these things. It was through SermonAudio I discovered preachers and churches who believe like me. I discovered that I am not alone. It was a great encouragement for me and for those of my group. We are not alone. I continue to tell them about my discoveries – there is no other way!

Especially in these years, I found great inspiration in what God is doing in the Free Presbyterian Church. I listened to hundreds of their sermons and I can say that some of the steps I took were because of the inspiration I found in them. I am a Reformed Baptist – and I also found a great preacher of this orientation in Albert Martin. I need very much such serious preaching – this kind of preaching changes lives.

Friends

Through SermonAudio I also found friends: preachers who wrote me and some who are praying for me and my work and my group, and for whom I am praying. Usually I am praying for the preachers whose sermons I listen to. I understand this is also a work God gave me to do. One of these friends who is so kind as to correspond with me is Rev. Ivan Foster from Northern Ireland. And here I must mention Pastor Ovadal. From him I heard about the compromise of the 'New Calvinists'. I listened to his programs about that, I read his article, I checked the internet links – after that, being convinced that things are as he presented them, I wrote two articles in Romanian, with links to all the materials he indicated – and we posted it on our website, so others may know these things also. It was a kind of collaboration between us.

I also preach in churches when I am invited to do so. I am preaching in Hungarian also. One of my grandmothers is Hungarian. I was a teacher in a village ten years ago and then I made the acquaintance of two Hungarian Baptist churches there. This year we celebrated ten years of service there. My wife and I, and one friend are going one Sunday every month to the two churches to preach there. These are small churches: one has five members, all over 60 years of age and the other maybe ten members.

My work is to testify in Romania about the Doctrines of Grace, through our group, through my preaching, through my website. I also have the opportunity of translating good books into Romanian. I am working for a Christian Publishing House here. This year I translated Jonathan Edwards' Charity and Its Fruit – a commentary on 1 Corinthians 13; after that I revised the translation of Edwards' Religious Affections; now I am translating Baxter's Reformed Pastor. Translating it, I am touched and taught many things regarding the ministry!

Some years ago, I read Bunyan's "Saved by Grace". I found it such a blessing that I said to myself: I will translate it into Romanian and I will read it at our group meetings. I did so and I read the book in maybe four sessions. One of those present said: "The book is so good, that we must seek a way to publish it, for others must read it in Romania". So, with God's help, we succeeded in publishing it as a work of our group. Many of the copies we offered free to Christians and to unconverted people. Another publication was Jonathan Edwards' sermon: "Sinners in the hands of an angry God". I translated it for our group and after that it was published.

Another way to promote the Reformed doctrines among our people here was to make some audio messages in Romanian from Spurgeon's sermons. Christians here know very little about Spurgeon. Preachers used to tell them two or three anecdotes about Spurgeon (everybody knows that he used humour in preaching), but



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this is all. Making these audio sermons helped people to know something about the content of Spurgeon's sermons, about his theology. Very few Baptists knew that he was Reformed in theology. These sermons, ten or so, on our website, were helpful. People discovered them and some came to listen to other messages on our website after listening to these sermons of Spurgeon. I made audio sermons from other preachers' sermons: Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Calvin's sermons on Jonah, Thomas Manton on the Transfiguration of Christ, Andrew Bonar, George Whitefield, two from Luther, even one of Asahel Nettleton, John Gill and Edward Griffin. Of course, the idea to do that was taken from the AudioSermon website – I saw there the sermons of these preachers in English and I told myself: "We need this thing in Romanian also".

I am not a great preacher and our website is not SermonAudio, but we must work faithfully with what God has given us. God has given us a part in His work and we must be faithful to God in this generation, as David was in his generation.

I must say something about preaching. Most of what I know about preaching, I learned from Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He gave me a very high and serious perspective on preaching. I do not like a preaching full of humour, anecdotes and superficial treatment of the Word of God. John MacArthur taught me the Sufficiency of Scripture – for my faith and Christian living. Martyn Lloyd-Jones taught me the Sufficiency of preaching – for the salvation of others and for building up the Body of Christ. Now I am learning the most difficult lesson: the Sufficiency of prayer. I am a very slow learner in that. But all three go together. And to learn these it is a process.