



EBF Theology and Education Division

**Symposium „Baptist Churches and Changing Society:  
Eastern-European Experience“**

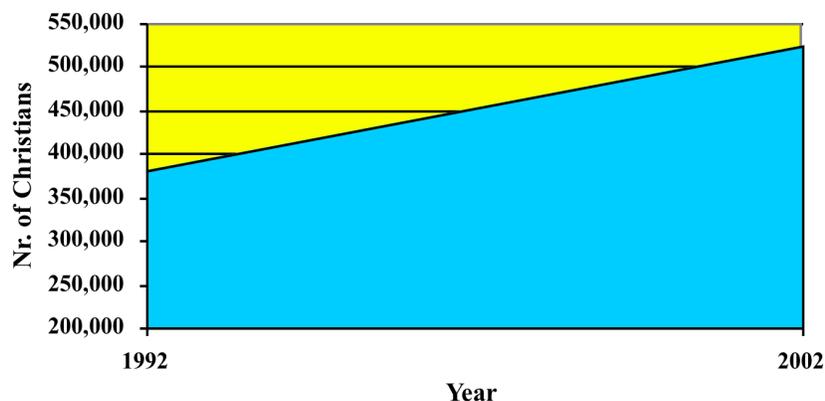
30 September - 2 October 2010, Tartu, Estonia

**How We Interpret Our Story?  
New Challenges for Romanian Baptists**

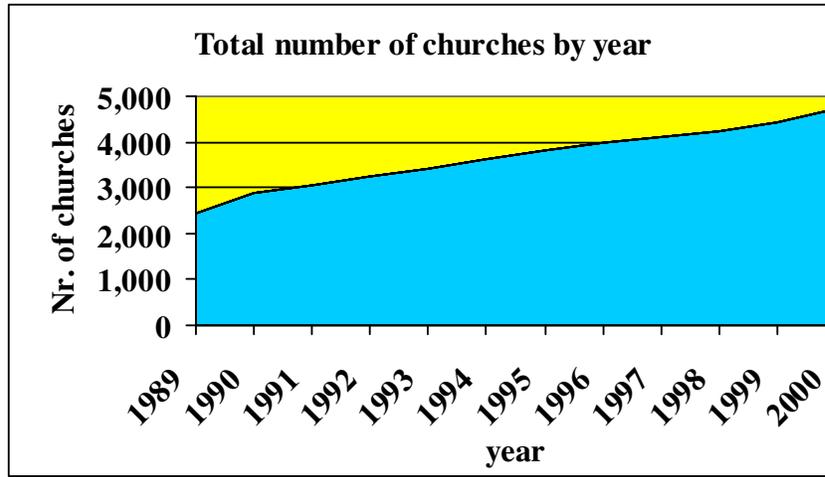
**Corneliu Boingeanu**

The documented history of the Romanian Baptist origins is traced back to the year 1856 when a missionary couple from Germany moved to Bucharest and planted a church initially for the German speaking community. However, this “spark” of mission in Romania was enough to fire up a church planting movement in the whole country, motivating missionaries from Ukraine and Hungary to come along and spread the gospel in this new mission field. A similar desire for church planting in Romania fired up the hearts of different Romanian leaders who put their life on God’s altar in order to spread the light of God’s Kingdom everywhere in the country. Today, after more than 150 years of Baptist testimony in Romania, we realize that God’s Kingdom has been extended in our country by His grace demonstrated to us through the sacrifice of different European and American missionaries. Of course, during all these years Romanian Baptists have faced a lot of difficulties, especially during the 45 years of communism when the Baptist churches were severely restricted in their mission. However, in spite of all these difficulties, we have seen God’s tremendous power manifested in our midst in building His Church in Romania. Not surprisingly, today Romania is the third largest country in terms of evangelical Christians in Europe (after England and Germany). Immediately after the fall of communism in Romania we experienced a huge increase in the number of evangelical Christians in our country.

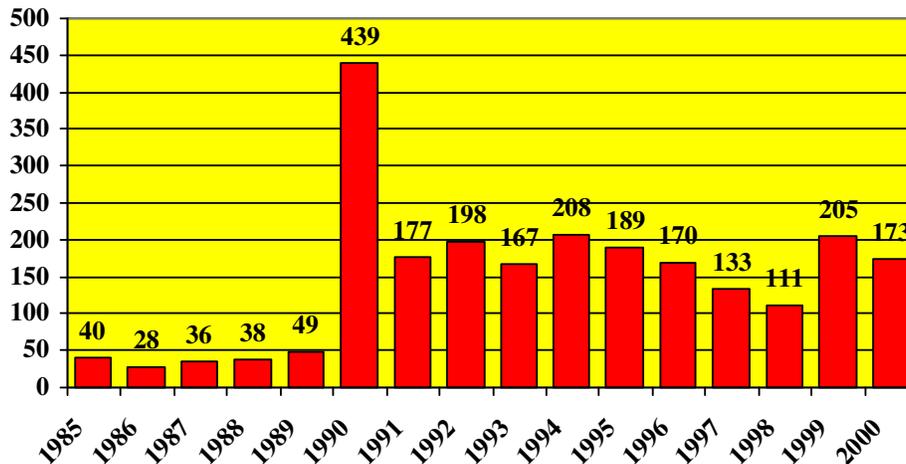
**The growth of the number of evangelical Christians**



According to the 2002 Census in Romania, we registered an increase of 145,000 evangelical Christians.<sup>1</sup> According to statistics from OC International Romania, today the number of evangelical Christians is approx. 800,000. This, in turn, generated a church planting movement among the evangelical churches in Romania.



It was a great enthusiasm for every believer to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in places where the gospel was not yet known. Approximately 2,600 new churches were started in the first decade after the revolution in Romania. This means that five new churches were opened every Sunday in this period of time. In order to have a larger picture of what happened during those years, look in the following graph at the number of churches planted every year between 1985 and 2000.<sup>2</sup>



However, inspite of all these encouraging statistics, the reality is that today only 3% of the Romanian population attends an evangelical church. This means that 21,000,000 people are still waiting to be confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ and become members of an

<sup>1</sup> This statistic was done by OC International Romania.

<sup>2</sup> This graph is based on 4,242 Churches for which OC International has information for the founding year.

evangelical church in Romania. It is also important that over 7,000,000 people out of those 21,000,000 non-evangelicals, live in a place that has no evangelical church. In other terms, today 7,000,000 people from 10,000 towns do not have access to an evangelical church. This makes our task even more difficult in our attempt to plant at least one evangelical church in every village, city or town in Romania. It is our prayer that by the year 2020 every one of these villages, cities and towns would have the testimony of an evangelical church. This task can be, indeed, fulfilled since God has opened for us a new strategy for church planting in Romania. This new strategy has been developed by different Baptist leaders in Romania in the last year and emphasizes both the importance of reading the Bible with nonbelievers in their homes and the power of the gospel to change their life. Therefore, we as Baptists in Romania, are challenged to generate a national movement among our people in order to motivate them to read their Bible. This project is called "The Bible Reading National Campaign" and motivates Romanian Baptists to start small groups for Bible reading in different homes, especially among those people who have no access to an evangelical church in their town. We have started this project at the beginning of this year and we realized that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the hearts of our people, motivating them to read the Bible. In addition to this, the Romanian Baptists have recently been challenged to take the gospel even beyond the borders of our country. Since 2007, when Romania joined the European Union, we have understood that God has given us a new challenge to be His witness in the whole continent of Europe. With the view that Christian mission started in God's heart and became evident through Jesus Christ who came from heaven to earth, we are also motivated to go and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in other cultures. We strongly believe that Europe is not under the control of the evil forces, as many people believe today, but we affirm that our continent is God's territory and He has a great plan to reach the lost people from the entire continent of Europe. God's plan is revealed to us in Acts 1:8 where Jesus instructs His disciples, saying: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". This also tells us that our mission is not only the city where we live, and not only our country or culture but other cultures and nations of the world as well. Therefore, since 2007, in order to obey God's command, we have decided to develop a mission plan for the whole of Europe. Our motivation is the fact that we have been blessed by God so that we might be a blessing to other people in different cultures. We have also been motivated by different modern missionaries as we have seen their fire for mission developed among other nations of the world. As we all know, the modern mission started with William Carey who obeyed God's call for him to go as a missionary to India. His commitment for mission fired up the hearts of his own people in almost all the churches in England. The same fire for mission has been brought by God to North America and then to some countries in South America. More recently this fire for mission captured the hearts of God's people in South Korea. Thousands of missionaries from South Korea obey God's call to go as missionaries to other nations in our world today. However, our belief is that God wants to flame the fire for mission in Europe again. We, as Romanian Baptists, decided to extend our vision and develop a missionary project for Europe, which began in 2007 and continues today. This project is called "Missions Torch Europe". This project was generated by the Baptist Union of Romania in partnership with other Baptist churches from Moldova and Ukraine. Several teams of Christ's witnesses from these countries -- people with a passion for God intensely burning in their hearts -- have traveled to the capitals of the other European countries carrying with them, symbolically, the "Torch" of divine mission in

Europe. In this way, the witness of divine presence in our generation has been carried like a living torch over the entire continent. The "Mission Torch Europe" started in 2007 on February 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> in Bucharest at Holy Trinity Baptist Church where we also had representatives from other Eastern European countries. From there on the "Torch" followed a certain route through 39 European capitals and will return to Bucharest at the end of 2010. During this time we have prayed that Christian communities across the continent would be fired up for unity, prayer and mission. This mission expedition has outlined, with the line of fire of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual "map" of the European continent which is emphasized in equal measure by the historical markers of the divine works realized in this region of the world as well as the spiritual resources which God has put here for the continuity of His great plan of redemption for our generation. Consequently, the "Mission Torch Europe" enthusiastically proclaims the truth by which our continent will find itself close to God, and therefore, we believe that He will continue His European project until He finishes the work that He began in us (Phil. 1:6). It is evident that even from its inception the volatile history of the European continent was interwoven with elements of divine grace, which prolonged the existence of human generations in this region until today. From the first steps made by the Apostle Paul onto European soil (see Acts 16:9-12) until now, Europe has been blessed by God with witnesses of faith who kept their hands raised in prayer for divine protection over the peoples of this continent. The testimonies of C.H. Spurgeon, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Martin Luther, David Livingstone, John Wesley, Francisc de Assisi, etc., are still heard on the continent even today. Who can know how great was the impact of the prayers of our European ancestors that today we still enjoy so much of the grace of God in Europe? It is enough, I believe, to note the fact that the kingdoms of the world that have opposed the divine plan, in various stages of human history, were overthrown and thus suffered the same fate as other secular kingdoms, while Europe continues to exist by God's grace. The "Mission Torch Europe" reiterates the fact that secularism, materialism and humanism (the dark clouds of postmodern European spirituality) are foreign bodies in the spiritual being of Europe, and that these corrupt spiritual forms must ultimately be rejected in order to reflect the full glory of the divine sovereignty over our existence on this continent. Truly, contemporary Europe is an important depository of economics, politics and ideology, but which, apparently, offers little room for belief in God. From that, one considers that it is hard to understand how a political structure such as the European Union, can continue to resist under the pressure of divine judgment! There can be no other explanation than the fact that God is showing grace to Europe with a certain final purpose related to His kingdom. We believe that after the time of the European migration, after the time of the Renaissance, after the time of exploration and discovery to the realization of the colonialist powers (Portugal, Spain, France, Holland and Great Britain), and after the age of democracy and industrial revolution, there came a time of spiritual renaissance to this continent. Europe has not yet said its last word in Christian mission in our generation. God still has work to do in Europe and with Europe! Without a doubt, Europe's present spiritual crisis cannot be ignored. In this continent the lowest rate of growth of Christian churches in the whole world is recorded. In addition, according to missiologists, the European continent is the most difficult spiritual terrain and people are the least interested in the gospel today. If we add to this spiritually gloomy picture the reality of 400 different ethnic groups now living in Europe who are unreached with the gospel, and the continuing growth of Islam, then we can understand the profound tragedy of this continent. Therefore, in spite of this crisis, we believe that the breeze of the Spirit of the life of God has begun to blow over the continent

of Europe in these turbulent times. The ancient continent is ready to experience the power of spiritual revival, which God will bring to Europe in these last days of our contemporary reality. Motivated by this act of faith, we desire to offer the start of the “Mission Torch Europe” in order to give testimony of the extraordinary power of God to reinvigorate the spiritual life of the European continent and to extend the divine kingdom in this strategic region of the globe. Therefore, our mission expedition through European capitals in support of the “Mission Torch Europe” project seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

**1. The creation of a prayer chain in Europe.** The capitals of Europe can be spiritually connected by a chain of prayer, which will encourage the entire continent like a ring of divine presence around it. Our conviction is that nothing else can keep us united as Europeans, and nothing else can keep our spiritual integrity as well as the common prayer of local churches from the countries of this continent. The common prayers of believers from the continent will build a spiritual ring around Europe, which will connect all of the countries like a highway of divine blessing. The “Mission Torch Europe” is thus a torch of prayers and a connection of spiritual power, which encourages the continent to facilitate the experience of divine presence in our generation that is so far from God. No other current structure can keep Europe in faith as can our common prayer. Can you imagine the enthusiasm and spiritual forces generated by the common prayer of diverse European nations (Romanians with Russians, Ukrainians with Hungarians, British with French, Greeks with Macedonians, and so forth) when, in spite of their national sentiments or cultural differences, European countries will all come together in prayer before God, asking with a single voice for divine blessing on this continent? Europe has not yet experienced what God can do here when His faithful witnesses unite in prayer! Therefore, we believe that the Torch’s travels to the European capitals can be like spiritual ripples, which will encourage the continent and motivate the Christian church to prayer.

**2. A spiritual revival of local churches in Europe.** It is well known that in certain regions of the continent local churches have lost their spiritual vitality for fulfilling their mandate to represent God in our generation. From this perspective, our mission itinerary in Europe may be seen as being a journey to transmit the torch of spiritual revival to all countries in Europe. We carried throughout Europe, with the other participants, the fire of passion for God and the light of Christian witness, hoping to energize every community of faith on the continent through the power of the Holy Spirit. Hoping that, through the power of God and through the faith of His followers in this generation, the dry church structures of some faith communities in Europe will be revitalized and begin to register remarkable spiritual growth. Then the timidity of small groups of Christ’s witnesses across the vast European continent (which now seem to be frozen by the spiritual secularization of the majority of unbelievers) will be replaced with the courage of living in faith with God. This mode of spiritual life will light with intensity local churches from Europe, which will then become lights of the Truth for the entire continent and a testimony of the divine wonders for the whole world.

**3. The spreading of a witness to the work Christ is doing today in different regions of Europe.** Never, since the first missionary journey of Paul to Europe until today, has our continent lacked a testimony to faith in God. Sparks of Christian faith lit (many times with a smoldering fire), different areas of Europe in which churches recorded special experiences with God. Unfortunately, believers in other European countries who, perhaps, now live in a

spiritually barren area where there are few spiritual results, do not know many of those testimonies. The “Mission Torch Europe”, over a three-year period of time, can joyfully carry the testimonies of Christ’s modern day disciples to other regions of the continent. It can share with everyone who wants to know the work of Christ in our times, miraculous elements of extending the kingdom of God in this part of the world. Our continent is of His kingdom and clear evidence of God’s works spreading throughout Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, Western Europe, the Balkans and Eurasia exists. We want the Torch’s route through Europe to be an itinerary of Christian testimony of the divine works being accomplished in our generation, testimonies which intensify our joy in order to know that we serve an almighty, living God who still holds the peoples of Europe in His hands, in order to make them in accordance with His great plan for the whole world.

**4. The development of partnerships with diverse churches in Europe.** At various times European churches have developed, either intentionally or not, a parochial spirit in their ministries. The independent spirit and desire to build a “kingdom” of their own alienated some European churches from others, causing them to lose the power of unity in ministry. This inward turning of local churches to themselves led them to depart from the spiritual needs of unreached people groups living in Europe. Today, approximately 400 different ethnic groups located in Europe have not been reached with the truth of the gospel. The “Mission Torch Europe” carries with it the message of Christ to His church, to turn with love toward the people who do not yet know the divine truth (Mark 1:38). Furthermore, the trips of the “Torch” throughout Europe are meant to create a network of spiritual connection among diverse churches on the continent, which will lead to a spirit of unity in ministry and a desire to cooperate in the proclamation of the gospel to unevangelized people groups. The local churches that connect in this network of spiritual service will become the future pillars for additional European missionary projects. Europe hasn’t yet seen what churches connected to God by ropes of love can do together to meet the spiritual needs of this continent!

**5. The spiritual reinvigoration of missionaries for unreached countries of the world (especially Muslim countries).** Europe was an important base of modern world mission. Thousands of European missionaries heard the command of God and left, with courage and sacrifice, for territories and countries where the gospel of Christ had not been known before their arrival. However, the arrival of postmodernity in Europe has greatly reduced that same spirit of cross-cultural mission from European churches. And this has happened just now in the very time when the spiritual needs of our world continue to grow. Today, more than ever, Muslim countries need the expression of authentic, Christian love among the nations where hope has almost died in people’s hearts. Who still carries the flame of love for Muslims in Europe today? We hope that God lights the fire for world mission especially in Eastern Europe (the region which never reached the intensity of missionary flame as churches in the West once had). The “Mission Torch Europe” desires to carry to the continent the holy thrill and passionate flame for world mission, which God put in the heart of William Carey nearly 200 years ago.