

SKY
Through The
BARS

Inspirational Memoirs
of Faith and Courage

THE SKY THROUGH BARS

BY
LIGIA BRIE

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The Sky Through Bars

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

I remember as a twelve-year-old that a Romanian family in the Detroit Class corresponded regularly with brethren in Romania. Then WWII came and ended, followed by years of silence until after Communism fell in 1989. Yes, the Bible Students survived in Romania!

As I served the various classes in Romania in the early 1990s, I was sobered and inspired by personal accounts of persecution endured by Romanian brethren even before WWII when the influence of the priests was dominant. WWII came with the Nazi Occupation until 1945, followed by the Communist rule of the 1990s. What a wealth of examples of suffering for the Truth! Every return trip to Romania caused me to feel very humble among these “living epistles” of joint sufferers with Christ. I was determined that this era of persecution must be preserved for future generations and the saints abroad. It was unfortunate that the history of the “living epistles” of suffering and martyrdom of our brethren in Poland was not preserved in permanent form.

When Sr. Ligia Brie graduated from the university, she wanted to spend a year in full-time service. I asked if she would be willing to interview the persecuted saints and record their testimonies in a book before it was too late. She readily agreed. The book has been published in Romanian. Now it is with heartfelt thanks to the Lord that *The Sky Through Bars* is ready for publication in English. I know these testimonies of “little nobodies” in the eyes of the world, but spectacles to the saints, will touch your heart as they have mine.

My heartfelt thanks to Sr. Ligia for making this book possible. Much appreciation to Sr. Claudia Tosa, who labored long in making the English translation. Many thanks to Sr. Alys Schneider and her willing associates who persevered in the proofreading and style corrections. Then again, for her labors in formatting the text for publication and Sr. Estelle Gill's artistic assistance with the cover design and photographs.

The Sky Through Bars goes forth with the prayer that it will inspire you to quicken your steps in the narrow way.

Ken Rawson
June 1, 2008

THE SKY THROUGH BARS

Material collected and compiled by Ligia Brie.

The Romanian version was originally published in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in July 2001.

DEDICATION

The title of this book is significant. Not because it has some poetic, metaphoric force. No! Its significance resides in the fact that this title expresses the personal experience of a brother. For years and years he, and so many others like him, have followed the celestial spectacle from behind bars, and still, with tears of happiness in their eyes they exclaimed, "*How beautiful is the sky seen through bars!*" We are sure that their look penetrated beyond the clouds, beyond the canopy of heaven, and even beyond the sun.

This book is dedicated to them, as well as to all those who will feel blessed and encouraged by reading it.

We thank all who in one way or another supported us in making the publication of this book possible.

Thanks be given to Him, Who makes all things possible. To Him are due praise, honor and glory forever!

THE SKY THROUGH BARS

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**Dawning of the Harvest
in Romania**

PART ONE

THE DAWN OF THE TRUTH IN ROMANIA

INTRODUCTION

Generally, two things are necessary to put together a historical record: reliable sources and competency in writing the history. Deficiencies exist in both. For that reason, we assume responsibility for what is lacking in this effort, in any way it would be manifested.

Regarding the sources, we found very few written documents. We will enumerate them: a few reports in the Reprints (1909-1916); reports addressed to Br. Russell by those who were active in Transylvania, which we will quote in full; also, a collection of *Watch Towers* from 1920-1923 in the Romanian language, where we see the gradual infiltration of Rutherford's doctrines; *The Siftings of the Harvest*, a work that describes the activity of the "Viata" (Life) Society and the trials of that period; *The Wakeup Call*, which appeared in 1930 and marks the moment of breaking away from the Jehovah's Witnesses; the *Studies in the Scriptures* magazine, which covers the first years of the third decade and indicates the restart of the Harvest activity. These are all the written documents we could find and from which we were able to reconstruct the history of those years. From 1934, we continued the history from interviews with the sources.

Regarding these sources, we have found confusion, contradiction, and ambiguities. For this reason, we have tried to verify information from two or three sources as much as possible. This is especially true

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in regard to the interwar events, about which the older brethren related because the witnesses and direct participants are no longer living. It is not hard to understand that memories can play tricks on us.

The Communist period was easier to follow, being closer to our time.

At this point, a few explanations are necessary regarding the general structure of “Part One—The Dawn of the Truth in Romania.” For a more thorough and accurate understanding of the history of the brethren and their testimonies, “A Short Overview of the History of the Country” seemed necessary. The penetration of the Truth in Romania and the decade that followed we titled “The Szabo Moment,” after the name of its principal proponent among the brethren (1911-1920). The next chapter is dedicated to the “Viata” Society and follows the line of events up to its breaking down (1920-1930). From this point up to the establishment of the Communist regime we will follow with “Bringing Their World Out of Chaos” (1930-1948). “The Communist Period—Trials and Blessings” relates the events that took place during a half century (1948-1989). In conclusion is a brief report regarding the post-revolutionary activity (1989-2000)—“The Activity Since 1990.”



“The Great Romania”

In 1918 all the Romanian provinces were united to form “The Great Romania,” which also included Bessarabia, the current Moldovan Republic.

(Quoted from Page 7)

CHAPTER ONE

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY

Naturally, the present psychological portrait of a people depends on the universally accepted truths of its history.

Romania's destiny did not differ too much from that of other small nations in Eastern Europe. Being at the junction between Orient and Occident, three great world powers—the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires—continually took advantage of Romania.

Romania began national emancipation at the same time as its neighboring nations, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, etc., in the middle of the nineteenth century, completing the process at the end of World War I (1918), at the same time as the collapse of the empires. Until then, the three Romanian principalities (Transylvania, Moldova and Wallachia) had been through a long sequence of wars for the preservation of independence—or at least some kind of autonomy.

Between the First and Second World Wars was definitely one of the short periods of economic prosperity and political freedom. But at the end of World War II, the three victors, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, acting in the well-known style of the great powers, divided the world into spheres of influence. Eastern Europe was infested with the red scourge of Communism. Romania, especially, had to endure one of the more severe Communist dictatorships. As a result, a new half century of regress and waste was to follow.

From 1985, at the time of Gorbachev's Perestroika, the Communist regimes imposed upon Eastern Europe started to fall, one after another. The last Communist bastion—Romania—finally fell at the end of 1989. Thus ended a long period of deprivation of personal freedoms, such as freedom of expression and freedom of thought. Poor living standards due to rationing of basic products, daily electricity black-outs, lack of heat in homes, hot water stoppages, etc.—all contributed to a lack of self-reliance.

The year 1990 brought democracy—a democracy still in its infancy. The transition period would prove much longer and more difficult than at first imagined. For the majority, their welfare remained a dream blown in the wind by the political structures being formed.

This is the history of Romania in a few sentences. As conclusions might only be subjective, we would say that these difficult conditions which Romanians have always had to endure have developed a general spirit of resignation. Revolts would only take place—as the saying goes—when “the knife would cut to the bone.” The long periods of slavery of one kind or another—up front or disguised—kept the population in material misery, blocking their access to education and emancipation. Most often, people on the edge of survival were content with very little. Presently, the Jubilee spirit makes its presence known by people being less willing to endure than they had been in the past. This is manifest in the street revolts or strikes of many social or socio-professional categories.

The Sky Through Bars follows events as the history of the Bible Students unfolds beginning in 1911. Therefore, two additional points regarding this period need to be clarified for a more accurate understanding of the events that are often referred to by the brethren in their stories.

In 1911, Transylvania was incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a province with a majority population of Romanians (70%) whose religion was Orthodox. At this time Transylvania was undergoing a strong process of forced assimilation with the Hungarian culture and the Roman Catholic religion. However, a movement of intellectuals developed which played a decisive role in the national emancipation and unification with the other two Romanian provinces—Moldova and “The Romanian

Country.” This unification was accomplished in 1918 after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Romanian’s reunification was the result of its having joined with the victors: the Triple Entente nations (France, Russia and Great Britain) and other allies (including the United States).

Thus, in 1918 all the Romanian provinces were united to form “The Great Romania,” which also included Bessarabia, the current Moldovan Republic. The majority of Moldova’s population is Romanian but, because of its opening to the Black Sea (among other riches it possesses), it was constantly coveted by its strong neighbor from the East, Russia. The latter incorporated the former during World War II through the “Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty” (1939).

A year later, through the Vienna Conference, a large part of Transylvania was snatched to be incorporated into Hungary. But at the end of the war, Hungary, being defeated, again lost Transylvania to Romania. (The map on page 4 indicates in a dark color the land extorted from Romania during this period.) The territory of Moldova on the other side of the Prut River became a component part of the USSR and was forced into a cruel process of Russianization (e.g., the Romanian language was studied in schools as a “foreign” language).



Josef Kiss and Karl Szabo

CHAPTER TWO

THE “SZABO MOMENT”

The period between 1911 and 1920 is marked by the figures of Karl Szabo and Josef Kiss, two pilgrims from the United States who returned to their native homeland in Transylvania in 1911 for the purpose of proclaiming the Truth. They settled in Tirgu-Mures, a city with a large Hungarian ethnic representation. From there, they began to preach in many parts of Transylvania.

But let us first take a look at the written information we have from the *Watch Towers*, these being reports that Br. Szabo sent to Br. Russell regarding the work they were doing. As mentioned, Transylvania or Romania were not specified—but only Hungary.

In August 1909 (R.4450) the *Watch Towers* refer to Hungarian literature for the first time under the title “Hungarian Volunteer Matter,” which announces the availability of the brochure “Peoples Pulpit” in the Hungarian language. It is mentioned in this article that the Hungarian language was spoken in most of the Central and Eastern European cities.

In October 1913 (R.5337) under the title “Some Interesting Letters” there is an article entitled “The Work in Hungary,” signed by Karl Szabo. Following is his report:

Dear Br. Russell:

The work in Hungary is much more difficult than in America, because the friends, with few exceptions, are very poor, and the work

must be done on a much smaller scale. All would gladly work if they could find work to do. (This evidently refers to labor conditions.) We were obliged to give a number of the books free, and we were glad to be privileged thus to serve the Lord.

Last year I had 50,000 “Peoples Pulpits” and also 400 volumes of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES Hungarian. These are all out now, and more are ordered.

There are at present forty-two small classes in various counties, where we are received with gladness, and they rejoice with us in the revelation of Present Truth. The eleventh and twelfth of May we had a little convention, about 100 being present. How good and how pleasant it was to be there! (Psa. 133:1) Some strangers were among us that gave evidence of being interested.

Seven brethren were elected as workers and servants of the Truth—Br. Kiss, myself and five others. We have conventions semi-annually, and spend the time in building one another up and studying THE DIVINE PLAN. We rejoice in spirit with the brethren at a great distance, with whom we seldom come in contact. We had a baptism service, at which seventeen brethren and ten sisters symbolized their consecration into Christ’s death. About 1,000 people were present at this service, even the police, and it was a blessing that they were there, for somebody wanted to create a disturbance, but the police quickly restored order. Praise the Lord!

We believe that none of these blinded men will be able to destroy the work of the Lord, but rather that all things will be done after the counsel of his own will. One of those who are now opposing the Truth was with us for two years and was very zealous in spreading the Truth; he gave up a paying position to be more fully used in the service, and because of his activities was cast out of the Baptist church. Now, however, he has turned against us.

There is great need at present for a brother who can speak both Romanian and Hungarian, to help the friends and to aid in building them up to the full stature of a man. (Eph.4:13) Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send more laborers into the vineyard.—Matt. 9:37,38.

The pastors and priests of various denominations have sought to stop our work in a legal way. We were hauled before the court. We have been able so far to defend our course. We hope also in the future

to be able to hold high the Divine banner, going forth and following the living Captain of our faith, as well as his honored servant, our beloved Pastor C. T. Russell, and say with the Apostle Paul, "We are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

KARL SZABO. —Hungaria.

By saying "Hungary," Br. Szabo was, no doubt in fact, referring to the Transylvania region of Austria-Hungary. Nevertheless, besides himself, there was need for another brother who spoke Romanian since Br. Szabo was weak in the Romanian language. Both by his own word—and generations of oral traditions—it was understood that he arrived in 1911, staying in the country for two years.

The next report dated July 1915 (R.5728) relates a story that happened on the Eastern Front during World War I. This fragment from one of Br. Russell's convention discourses is entitled, "A Letter of Deep Interest":

I have something to read to you. It is a translation of a letter. It was written in Hungarian, to a Slav brother in the United States, and was forwarded to us. A portion of the letter follows:

"A Hungarian soldier, injured on the battlefield, was returned home wounded. He was there met by some of our brethren, and later was led to diligent and earnest study of the Scriptures, and finally made his consecration to the Lord. This he symbolized last January, at the hands of our dear Br. Szabo. A few days later he was obliged to return to the front and to the trench, in Galicia. A cannon shot burned the cap from his head; earth caved in upon him. He was dug out by his comrades and again sent to the hospital. This brought the dear brother into our midst again, but for a short time only. Presently he had to return to the firing line again.

"This time they came within 800 feet of the Russian line, and they received the command, 'A bayonet charge!' The Hungarian brother was at the end of the left wing. He sought only to protect himself from the enemy, hence he endeavored merely to knock the bayonet from the hand of the Russian with whom he was confronted. Just then he observed that the Russian was endeavoring to do likewise. Instead of using his opportunity to pierce his opponent, the Russian let his bayonet fall to the ground; he was weeping. Our

brother then looked at his ‘enemy’ closer—and he recognized a ‘Cross and Crown’ pin on his coat! The Russian, too, was a brother in the Lord! The Hungarian brother also wore a ‘Cross and Crown’ emblem on his cap.

“The two brethren quickly clasped hands and stepped aside. Their joy was overflowing, that our Heavenly Father had permitted them to meet even on the field of the enemy! They could not understand one another’s speech, but by signs they conversed, taking out their Bibles—and the Russian had the SCRIPTURE STUDIES in his pocket with a songbook, all bound in one volume, and a photo of Br. Russell. The brother then took the bayonet of the Russian brother, and gave him over as a prisoner of war; and he still remains as such in Hungary, while the Hungarian brother has now been sent to the hospital for the third time.”

A similar story has been circulating in Romania among the older brethren for a long time. Although resembling each other very much—it is not certain if this written account is the same story. Also, we do not know if there was any Romanian literature before 1914, but we know that in that year there were Romanian First Volumes sent to the front. But people—some of them having become brethren—came back from the war with them.

A final report regarding the literature in the *Watch Towers* dates from the winter of 1916 as follows:

Beloved Br. Russell:

I am very glad to write you, by the grace of the Lord, regarding the spreading of literature and books this year (1915), and of the many joys and blessings which God has bestowed on us in all the trials and testings of the past:

SUMMARY

<i>Books circulated.....</i>	<i>1,650</i>
<i>Booklets.....</i>	<i>600</i>
<i>Watch Towers.....</i>	<i>6,000</i>
<i>Bible Students Monthly, etc.....</i>	<i>40,000</i>
<i>The issuance of Vol. II. — THE TIME IS AT HAND</i>	
<i>(Hungarian)—is in progress.</i>	

Incoming letters, 957; outgoing, 725.

207 have made a covenant with our Lord.

<i>Public meetings held.....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Parlor meetings.....</i>	<i>4,700</i>
<i>Meetings in the country.....</i>	<i>30</i>

A good number of Romanian publications were circulated. We have received the books sent, and are very thankful.

*With great love, hope and faithfulness,
Your co-laborer and brother,*

KARL SZABO

With the exception of the First Volume, we do not know what other publications were circulated in the Romanian language. However, it appears that literature was printed in the United States, but since 1919 there is evidence of literature being printed in Romania.

The information from the older brethren about this period is very scarce. But from Br. Ioan Galis’ report, we find out that the Truth penetrated “Valea Almasului” (the Almas River Valley) in 1912. A leader of the Baptist Church—Gheorghe Amaru (who also knew Hungarian)—had the occasion to talk with Br. Szabo. He became convinced of the Truth and, together, they started a great work of spreading the Truth. Many peasants in this area came to the knowledge and acceptance of the Truth, and large baptismal services were organized.

About this time a rich peasant known among the brethren as Br. Danila accepted the Truth. Because of his courage and his bold personality, he suffered much persecution from the local authorities, being condemned to prison by every regime under which he lived. During the Austro-Hungarian domination, he was denounced by the priesthood, which was very influential at that time, and suffered beatings and torture from them. Then the Communists put him in jail—at least three times. So he spent many years in prison. Br. Danila promoted certain “anti-modernist” concepts among the brethren. For example, that brethren should be dressed very simply without watches, without briefcases, with short hair, etc.—these being signs of humility. (In reality, these ideas generated conflicts among the brethren, because a great number of them lived in the city, were educated, and could not accept these kinds of rules.)

During this time, two large Bible Student centers of activity were being crystallized in Cluj and in Tirgu-Mures, where the Truth came to be embraced by more educated people who, in turn, became very useful in continuing to spread the divine message.

Br. Szabo’s method has been described as follows: he would display *The Divine Plan of the Ages* on high traffic roads or in places by the nominal churches, and then he would talk to the people who stopped to listen. He would travel to different villages and cities to colporteur. Br. Szabo would then teach those who accepted the Truth to do the same. They initiated studies in small circles and then, in time, they started organizing public meetings and local conventions.

Despite the poverty and the severity of the regime supported by the clergy, the Truth found many open hearts in various walks of life and social standing. From these small glimpses of the early moments in the time of Harvest, the Bible Student movement in Transylvania dawned gloriously.



*From these small glimpses of the early moments
in the time of Harvest, the Bible Student movement in
Transylvania dawned gloriously.*

(Quoted from Page 14)

**Brethren Who Worked at the Society
1920-1930**



Vasile and Maria Hurdubaia



Katy Ferencz

CHAPTER THREE

“VIATA” SOCIETY

The Initiative

This chapter regarding the “Viata” Society has the most written sources of information. These include a collection of *Watch Towers* from 1920-1923; *The Siftings of the Harvest*, which relates events between 1920-1926; and *The Awake Call*, dated 1930, which reproduces “The Resolution of the Polish Bible Students from America” (Detroit, Michigan, February 1, 1930), which justifies the separation from the Brooklyn Society. Between the years 1926-1930 there is a documentary gap. That was a period of difficult agitation when the fall of the Society, resounding court trials, and large divisions took place.

Going back to the beginning, in 1920—due to the success of the movement in Transylvania—the need for a new printing press was acutely felt. Until then, much of the literature was printed in the United States, though some was printed at different printing shops in Romania.

At the same time, due to the ethnic demographics of Transylvania, other questions arose. Would the Society be Hungarian or Romanian? Would its president be Hungarian or Romanian? Would the headquarters be in Tirgu-Mures or in Cluj? These questions were discussed before the setting up of the Society—and continued to exist and consume the Society in the years following.

Finally Rutherford decided:

“Because there is a great number of people who have received and believed the message of the kingdom as taught by the Society and the Association in Romania and they all speak Romanian; because the Society and Association through its legitimate officials consider it in harmony with the Lord’s will that a more active witness be given in Romanian; Therefore, putting our trust in Iacob B. Sima, a native of Romania, who from 1912 resided in the United States, and believing him to be a fully consecrated Christian and in full harmony with the politics of the above cited Society and Association, we name Iacob B. Sima as the representative of the Society and Association to work for it and under its direction and control for the Romanians; and for this he, the above named Sima, is hereby authorized and sent by the Society and Association in Romania to lead the Lord’s work in this country; this implies preaching the good news of the kingdom message, both orally and through written literature, and to do all he can to attract and unite the Lord’s people and to enlarge the kingdom message through those who have a hearing ear.

The named Karl Szabo will oversee the brethren and the leading of the work in the Hungarian language, which he speaks; and the named Sima will perform the same duties concerning the Romanian work...

For everybody’s convenience, the branch named above will be known as the ROMANIAN BRANCH but this will also lead the work in the Hungarian language.”

The letter was signed by J. F. Rutherford and dated April 1, 1920 (Watch Tower, February 1921).

Who was Iacob B. Sima?

An announcement published at Sima’s death in a newspaper of that time read: *“Yesterday the newspaper reporter Iacob B. Sima, journalist of great talent (he was a correspondent of many American press associations), finished his life.”*

Truly, Br. Sima could have built a strong career in his profession. But in America he met Pastor Russell (as he used to say “he shook the Laodicean messenger’s hand”) and this changed his life.



Letitia and Iacob Sima

After eight years of residency in the United States, he came back to Romania, and under the supervision of Rutherford, he formed a branch there of the Brooklyn Society, a branch that took shape as the “Viata” Society. An extensive activity in printing, colporteur work, pilgrim visits, and strengthening of the classes began to revolve around this Society. In fact, Br. Sima invested an immense amount of money in this Society—\$33,000 (6,494,718 lei)—at the monetary value of the year 1920 (*Siftings*, p. 26). When he became the president of the Society, he was about 30 years old. (His exact age is not known, but it can be deduced approximately from one of his expressions “even though young in age”—and also from the photos of the time).

A close co-worker of Br. Sima, with exceptional talents, was Br. Onisim Filipoiu. His story is recorded in more detail later in this book. But here we note that Br. Onisim, before knowing the Truth, was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. He had a good education, a lively intelligence, a tenacious spirit, an organized, methodical thinking process. Additionally, he possessed quite a bit of wealth, all of which he invested in the Society. He was named later by Rutherford “the representative of the Society” and the president from Brooklyn collaborated with him in all the problems that arose.

Another brother with a distinguished character and a reliable co-laborer of the Society was Br. Vasile Ciucas. He remains alive in the memories of the brethren because, in the discussions about the past, his name comes up frequently. He was a peasant from Ileanda, intelligent, meek, and of great perseverance. Many brethren came to the Truth through him, because he had a special talent for explaining the Truth. A letter from another brother appeared in the May 1923 *Watch Tower* entitled, “Where the Birds Sing”:

Beloved brethren: yesterday I arrived in Jac, where I was received quite warmly. After I came from Cluj to Panticeu, I was much sicker, but here I feel better again. It's in a wilderness state. The surrounding forests are beautiful, they are turning to green and the sweet songs of the birds resound majestically through the branches. The area surrounding the house where I stay is nice enough, but simple. The gardens and the orchards are green and beautifully in flower. The gentle breeze raises in the air the sweet aroma of the blossoming trees. The climate is rather pleasant in all. The food and water are splendid, as well as the rest.

I'm constantly thinking of you, as to how you are, and I would have much more peace if I were with you. Sweet greetings to all at the Society. Your brother in Christ, Vasile Ciucas.

Among these brethren there are others about whom we do not have much information. But they, like the ones already mentioned, also spent their lives in spreading the Truth, demonstrating their faithfulness through word and deed.

However, it is evident that this branch of the *Watch Tower* with the two sub-branches—one in Cluj, the other in Tirgu-Mures—was non-functional. About the Hungarian side, very little is known. In the beginning, it was led by Br. Szabo together with two other brethren. But Br. Szabo left and, in fact, disappeared entirely from the scene (we do not know where or why), and so the problem of his replacement came up. Committees were formed and dissolved. Then still others were formed and the Society in Cluj was brought into this conflict.

There were also conflicts between those who believed in and supported the Brooklyn Headquarters—and those who rejected it and tried to convince the brethren from the “Viata” Society to do the same.

“The leaders of the brethren in Tirgu Mures said that they would choose only the Watch Towers written by Br. Russell for publishing. Question: Do the Romanian and the Hungarian brethren from Romania believe that from 1916 the Lord didn’t give any light to his beloved?” [THE SIFTINGS OF THE HARVEST, p.11] Also, “But if the work of the Harvest from 1917 was great, full of happiness and joy, from 1918 on, it is exceedingly great. From 1918 the Lord is in his temple, judging and talking to his people through the many beautiful revelations and encouragements.” (Ibid., p.4.)

It is possible that these brethren believed strongly in the work promoted by Rutherford. Yet, as it would be proven later, those same brethren who wrote the above, would take a firm position against the Brooklyn Society in 1930. From what we were told, Br. Sima gradually began to see the wandering from Pastor Russell’s teachings and, therefore, began to censor those of the Brooklyn Society who were further from the truth he knew. In fact, Rutherford found out that Br. Sima was working too “independently” and sent a commission from Germany to verify these reports. But the results of this commission’s report to the Headquarters is not known.

The Printing Press

In 1920 the establishment of the Bible Students center in Cluj was greeted with much joy. It was initially located on Surdu Street in a house too small for all the activities that were going on there.

The brethren know the situation we spent days and years in, regarding the lodging and the living conditions. There were nights—and it was rare when this was not the case—that 10 or 15 brethren slept in a room as big as 3 meters wide (9.8’), 4 meters long (13.1’) and 2.60 meters high (8.5’), others slept outside, in the attic, at the neighbors’ and in other places. We owe it only to God that we were not hit with an illness because of the infected air. You were never sure that you would sleep all night in the same place where you went to sleep. Many times you had to change places two or even three times per night, or you had to restrict your space so another one or two brethren who arrived during the night would have room to sleep with you in a bed as wide as 70 cm (27.5”). (Ibid., p. 29.)

The need for more spacious lodging was obvious. So in 1924 an old, dilapidated house was bought which was located in downtown Cluj on Regina Maria Street (currently the “Heroes Boulevard”). During one year a new three-level house was built.

It is true that the house is bigger today than projected in the beginning, and it cost three times more than we had calculated in the beginning; and to be sincere, if we had to do this again (which we don't wish for ourselves or our children), we would do it a little differently. But who had known from the beginning all the obstacles and barriers that we would come across? ... Then the city required us to build at least three levels, and during the next five years to add another one, which was not planned in the beginning. We planned on two levels only, which would have cost us 1,800,000 lei. The printing shop was planned to be smaller, only 13 meters (42.7'), and without offices. It is now 23 meters (75.5') and with two levels, and even so it's almost too small. ... If somebody would ask us to do this again from the beginning, and to go through all the difficulties we went through, we would prefer to be put in jail and to have wood chopped on us. (Ibid., p. 30.)

Truly, this construction raised many problems, maybe even more than it solved. One of the greater problems was its financing, which was one of the main causes of its bankruptcy. The following passage reflects this issue:

Where did the money come from? ... The donations of the brethren were 900,000 lei. ... The loans from the brethren were 1,416,000 lei, which are almost all paid off. Again, where was the money coming from? The response is clear: the money was borrowed from banks and from private individuals, and for which during the year 1925 until October 1st we paid 537,159 lei interest. By January 1st 4,500,000 lei was spent on the house. Additionally, 3,500,000 lei had been borrowed from private individuals.

As it is well known, in the fall of last year we arrived at a situation where we were not able to pay even the interest. ... The monthly interest would increase to more than 100,000 lei—the danger was dreadful! And it was a time when we would have preferred to die rather than live. ... Then Br. Rutherford, seeing the danger that was

awaiting us, intervened in May of last year to provide us with 3,700,000 lei from a London bank. With the past due balance of the Society, the bank loaned to the house in Cluj through Br. Rutherford 7,600,000 lei, with an interest rate of 7 percent. ... The house is, therefore, owned by the Bank and 15 to 20 years will pass till it will be paid off. (Ibid., p.31.)

Now for a look at what the Society itself owned. On July 1, 1926, the Society owned 22 printing machines, valued at 7,190,000 lei.

The equipment included:

- 2 collating machines
- 2 printing presses
- 1 folder
- 1 stitcher
- 1 gold-embossing machine
- 1 paper cutter
- 1 motorized paper trimmer
- 1 perforator
- 1 gluer
- 1 press
- 1 rotary collator
- 1 machine for making/printing stereotype plates
- 1 press for corrections
- 300 kg. of type
- A variety of type-faces and sizes
- 1 machine for making/printing zincograph plates
- A stop watch, a calculator
- 1 automated machine for printing.

The value of the furniture of the press and of the offices was 244,850 lei and the paper was 512,850 lei. It is no wonder that the printing shop was considered “the most modern printing shop in Transylvania” (Ibid., p. 47). Not all these machines were acquired at once. Some of them came from the old printing shop; others were bought specifically for the new printing press and were of the most recent technology.

What was printed?

ROMÂNEST			MAGHIARE		
Anul	Câteva	TITLUL	Anul	Câteva	TITLUL
1920	10.000	Iaduri	1920	1.000	Vol. VII.
1920	10.000	"Unde-s Mortii"	1920	1.000	Intrebări
1920	5.000	Turnuri de Vegh.	1920	6.000	Turnuri de Vegh.
1921	12.000	Turnuri de Vegh.	1921	25.000	Milioane
1921	25.000	Milioane	1921	5.000	Calendare
1921	5.000	Tabernoale	1921	50.000	Speranța lumii
1921	500	Int. la Vol. I.	1921	1.500	Cărți de Cântări
1921	50.000	"Vestea Milen."	1921	12.000	Turnuri de Vegh.
1921	3.000	Calendare	1922	12.000	Turnuri de Vegh.
1922	5.000	Mane	1922	8.500	Calendare
1922	2.000	Cărți de Cântări	1922	128.000	Epoca de Aur
1922	10.000	Calendare 1923	1923	1.500	Mane
1922	12.000	Turnuri de Vegh.	1923	4.500	Cărți de Cântări
1922	30.000	Epoca de Aur	1923	10.000	Harfe
1923	10.000	Harfe	1924	18.000	Harfe
1923	10.000	Creațiunea	1924	4.000	Cărți de Cântări
1923	15.000	Calendare 1924	1924	20.000	Calendare
1923	216.000	Epoca de Aur	1924	15.000	Iaduri
1923	12.000	Turnuri de Vegh.	1924	20.000	Dezastru
1924	12.000	Turnuri de Vegh.	1924	25.000	Guvern
1924	168.000	Epoca de Aur	1924	10.000	Creațiunea
1924	4.500	Vol. VII.	1924	10.000	Socialismul
1924	20.000	Dezastru	1924	24.000	Turnuri de Vegh.
1924	25.000	Guvern	1924	168.000	Epoca de aur
1924	10.000	Socialismul	1925	5.000	Vol. I.
1924	4.000	Cărți de Cântări	1925	10.000	Vol. V.
1924	18.000	Calendare	1925	32.000	Calendare pe 1925
1925	10.000	Photo Drama	1925	10.000	Photo Drama
1925	10.000	Creațiunea	1925	5.000	Tabernoale
1925	4.500	Vol. VII. Ezekiel	1925	12.000	Turnuri de Vegh.
1925	10.000	De vorbă cu morți	1925	46.800	Epoca de Aur
1925	50.000	Foi gratis	1925	150.000	Foi
1925	16.000	Turnuri de Vegh.			

SUMARUL

449.500 cărți și broșuri legate	Lei 6.801.708
135.500 Turnuri de Veghere	" 811.000
752.300 Epoca de Aur	" 1.451.850
410.000 Foi gratis	" 150.000
Total	Lei 9.252.550

Literature Printed
Between 1920-1925
by the "Viata" Society
in Romanian and Hungarian.

From this huge inventory, it may be deduced that a considerable number of people were engaged. One announcement to recruit personnel stated:

Hiring: The Society is in need of a young sister, bright, quick, healthy in body and soul, in order to learn how to feed paper to the machines in the printing press. Those who match these criteria should write to us (should not come in person), showing her age, if she knows Hungarian, how much education she has, and if she has any dependents. The position is to be occupied immediately. (Watch Tower, May, 1923)

Pilgrims and Colporteurs

Most of the brethren were engaged in pilgrim and colporteur work. (See, for example, the conditions of the pilgrims and of the colporteurs as they are described in *The Siftings of the Harvest*, pp. 9, 10).

The happiest part of serving in the Lord's work is when you are able to talk with people and tell them about the Truth. It fills the heart of the speaker with joy and happiness and spreads the joy of the Lord to those who are listening. Therefore, as long as the work of the Lord to spread the Kingdom Gospel is not ended and the career of the Church on earth is not ended, the colporteur service is and will be the most important of them all.

The pilgrim service is important in its own way, but less pleasant for the pilgrim than colporteur work is for the colporteur. The experience demonstrates that only a few can bear psychologically in this service for a long time. How many faithful brethren, full of zeal and of the love of Christ, entered this service only to stop in a few years completely discouraged?

Their service among the brethren puts them in connection with all their hardships and these have a great effect on the pilgrim and it is seldom that he doesn't personally become touched and influenced by these, and it is not rare that they remain with him for life. He goes to a meeting—finds the brethren busy, discouraged, absent-minded, indifferent, and even sometimes divided and at odds with each other. Somehow he gets the brethren to come together. The poor pilgrim seeing this state of things almost becomes discouraged

himself; he almost doesn't know what to say—what would help them, what would stimulate them more. He starts his talk. One sleeps, another looks through his hymnbook, still another writes down verses, and so on. The discourse is over; the brethren leave; the pilgrim remains by the table. In his soul is great anxiety: was his coming of any value? Will they go back after the meeting to the same things they left to come to the meeting—the overwhelming and unending daily duties, unmindful of the spiritual things, with the lack of love and lack of understanding between themselves, and so many others? Wasn't he at this class over and over again with the same results? Were not so many other pilgrims there?

And maybe sitting by the table his hands fall down, his thoughts traveling to other hundreds of cases like this one that he has encountered in his few years of pilgrimage and he is often completely discouraged. In this state, he goes from meeting to meeting with the same result, until one day he gives up.

Somehow, this sad pattern does not sound foreign to us in the present. On the other hand, it is interesting to note, though, how much the colporteur work was appreciated. The Communist years were able to erase entirely this activity from the conscience of the brethren so that even after ten years from the Revolution—too few realize its importance and even fewer are practicing it.

In the May 1923 *Watch Tower*, the following pilgrims are listed as being “sent by the Society”: Karl Szabo, Vasile Ciucas, Teodor Cuculatan, George Copos, Vasile Costea, Lucaci Nemes, Josef Kiss, Jacob Benjamin, Teodor Veres, Hant Rosch, Emanuel Chinte, Onisim Filipoiu, Jacob Thiess, George Berariu.

In the same issue of the magazine (p. 68) under the subtitle “Colporteurs,” we find more about the life of the colporteurs and how living expenses were provided for those involved in this activity:

Those who are able, and there are many of these, should enter in the colporteur service. These receive a big discount, which will cover their living expenses, etc. Those who can do that should write to us and we will give them instructions of how to proceed.

There are brothers and sisters in all classes, who can consecrate at least part of their time to this service. Being summer, the village people are working the fields, we will try to do this on Sunday and during holidays. All villages must be scouted, one by one.

Ecclesia in Sadu



1920s - 1930s



Ecclesia in Ocna Slatina



**Various Meetings
1920 - 1930**



Truly the villages of Romania have been visited with this message of the Kingdom.

In the same issue of the magazine (p. 77) we have a “Report of the Lord’s Memorial,” and it says: “The following classes have reported the number of consecrated brethren who in the evening of March 30th partook of the Memorial of the Lord’s death.” There are 120 ecclesias listed with the number of members for each class. At the end, the report adds the following: “Others who partook were 118 in Hungary, 68 in Czechoslovakia, 24 in Yugoslavia, 9 in Bulgaria—2,955 in total.”

We conclude from this that of the 2,955 brethren in Eastern Europe, 2,736 were in Romania. Among the largest meetings were: Vulcan—183, Aninoasa—146, Iapa—105, Cluj—87, Tirgu-Mures—83, Rodna Veche and surrounding areas—83. The first two places listed are on the Jiu River Valley, and currently we do not know of any brethren there. The number of brethren in Iapa is less than half of what it used to be, and Tirgu-Mures has about a third of the number listed above. In Rodna there are ten brethren living today. Cluj has maintained about the same number of brethren.

A few other places on the report where there are still brethren today include: Baia-Mare and vicinities—60 (same today), Lupeni—52 (today—3), The Hungarian Manastur and vicinities—50 (today, if we include Bica, the number is about half), Jimbor and vicinities—45 (today—7), Uioara—41 (today Ocna-Mures—8), The Romanian Nimigea and vicinities—29 (today—1), Turda—34 (today—7), Feldru and vicinities—24 (today—10), Bucharest—23 (today—8), Gilau and vicinities—21 (today—7), Arad—20 (today—6), Ulciug and vicinities—18 (today—40), Macau—17 (today—1), Feleac—15 (today—1), Cucerdea—14 (today—80), Urca de campie—14 (today—8), Sibiu—11 (today—2), Salsig—11 (today—15), Apahida—9 (same today), Astileu—3 (same today).

There are a few places mentioned on that same list where today there are no brethren. But there is another factor which has to be taken into account. We do not know how many places and how many people became Jehovah’s Witnesses at the separation of 1930. However, it is interesting that six places from Bukovina are mentioned in this list as having brethren: Voitinel—41, Old Frataut—36, Upper Vicovel—13, Stulpicani—11, Radauti—11, New Frataut—8. There is also a place from Bessarabia (today—Republic of Moldova): Corgeuti—11.



**Ecclesia in Cluj
1920**



Bessarabia and Bukovina were annexed to the Soviet Union during World War I, and any ties with Romania were cut because of the de-nationalization and Russification efforts. In Criva—Bessarabia—there were brethren since the interwar period when Br. Ciucas was a pilgrim there. Nobody knew anything about them until the year 2000, which fills us with surprise and raises new questions.

The total number of brethren in Romania is about half—currently estimated at about 1,000 brethren. In the course of time, more brethren have been discovered in other areas, but they are still concentrated in the upper half of Transylvania. (This topic is discussed later.)

If we remember that the message of the Truth reached Romania for the first time in 1911 and the date of this report is 1923, the number of brethren being over 2,700, we can develop a better idea of the witness work performed during those 12 years. Even though it is just a number, we cannot but be moved by the effort, the sacrifice, and the enthusiasm lying behind that number!

Opposition

There is one topic that has not yet been touched regarding this period, and this topic is discussed in a *Watch Tower* magazine, namely the relationship with the authorities.

In March 1923, Br. Ion Burlacu sent the following report, which was published.

The Priests and the Truth

Dear Brother:

There was a priestly conference here yesterday, which gathered (not for proclaiming the kingdom of God, but) for criticizing the sects. I rejoiced much in this occasion, believing that my plans will be accomplished, but as was seen, the Lord's power was accomplished.

After the conference was finished, I asked to be allowed to speak as well, but the priests were all enraged at this request and shouted that I will not be allowed. They were telling the people not to listen to us under any circumstances. After all our insistence to speak before the people (before whom we have been accused) in order for them to see which one of us is lost, they admitted that we could talk but only privately with them. Finally, not having another possibility, I accepted. Then we entered with all the priests in a school to consult with each other. But what could you see? The people rushed over to us,

overcoming us, because they wanted to hear (poor world) these things. Then they were forced (in their own interest) to stop talking to us, but the people shouted that we should speak. Then I opened the Scriptures and I started to show how they impose their traditions on the people, and how far they are from the New Testament.

During this time there arose such a big dispute between the people and the priests, that you would think it was at the tower of Babel. Some believed what the Scriptures say, others did not. (Acts 28:24) Finally, the priests, in order to heal their reputation with the people, asked me to be baptized by them, in other words to repent of what I have done, and then they would anoint me with myrrh. I proposed to them that if they will explain to me the prophecies and Revelation, and also the parables and the words of the Scripture, then I will give in. Seeing that my proposal was immense, they said that they could not understand all these things. Then I asked them to explain to me only the books of Ezekiel and Revelation. Finally, seeing that they were in too deep, where they did not expect to be, they suggested that we should close the discussion for now and continue it on another occasion.

I remain happy, etc.

N. [Ion] Burlacu —Regat



Elena and Ion Burlacu

(Note: Regat is in the Old Romanian province including the southern and eastern part of Romania.)

We should say that this incident was among the happier ones. In the December 1921 *Watch Tower*, we have a less fortunate incident, in the form of a grievance addressed to the Secretary of Internal Affairs, which was supposed to guarantee religious freedom in Romania:

The Freedom of Religion in Romania

The freedom of all denominations is guaranteed, as long as their service does not interfere with the public order or with good morals.
— *Constitution, Article 21*

No punishment can be established or applied aside from the power of the law. — *Constitution, Article 16*

A number of citizens from Jara de Jos, believers in God and the Holy Scriptures, addressed the following grievance, which speaks for itself, to the Secretary of Internal Affairs in Cluj:

Mister General Secretary,

We, the submissive servants of the present earthly rule, urged by the illegalities that surround us daily, are constrained to inform you of the following We and our brethren, who through the grace of God are called to faith and emptied of the worldly things, in October 9th of the current year, were having our study and were praying fervently, when the gendarmes came upon us. They disturbed our meeting and escorted us, as in the Holy Scriptures (Mat. 26:57-58), before the Local Post Sheriff, Gross Dumitru, who, after receiving us one by one in his office, where after the question, “Are you a Protestant?” and after the answer “yes,” acting like a wild beast, beat me and 10 other believers—in the beginning with his hands and then with a club — so badly that my body and my brothers’ were totally broken and purple like a plum, and Ioan Blaga from Micus had his right arm broken, and Simion Popa from Jara de Jos had his left shoulder broken so badly that they are now crippled, and they beat Simion Beleu to the extreme, and therefore they are now unable to work, and to the others they caused serious injuries.

If the believers are in these sad situations, we ask ourselves a question: Where is this order coming from? Aren’t we permitted to

pray to the Lord God Sabbaoth, who created us all and who created everything, who is our Creator and who rules the world? ...

This grievance is signed by a group of eleven brethren.

This was not an isolated case! And even if Romania were a constitutional monarchy with a democratic regime, the rights of the individual being guaranteed through the law—all this was purely theoretic when it came to respecting religious rights. The clergy was unusually powerful and influential, and any possible diminishing of the authority, which they had over people, was harshly punished. Their main instruments were the gendarmes, who listened almost blindly to the priests.

This state of affairs, which reveals the abuse of the authorities in matters of manifestations of faith when it differed from the majority opinion, would continue until the regime changed. And then the brethren would have to endure other persecutors (the Communists). More than once was a brother accused by this “democratic regime” of being Communist and severely punished. Then when Communism reigned, that same brother was accused of fighting against the regime, being on the side of the old order and penalized as such!

In Search of Solutions

Let us come back now to the Society. *The Siftings of the Harvest* gives a report about the activities, the successes, and the trials of those who worked at “Viata.” In 1926 the Society was in a great dilemma. The spending for the construction of the printing press on Regina Maria Street was costly, much too costly, as can be seen in the reports. In addition, among the brethren the waters became more and more muddy. One of the problems was doctrine—and specifically the “Channel” from Brooklyn. Some of the brethren were able to see more and more clearly the wandering from Pastor Russell’s writings. On top of this, other problems began to manifest themselves. These were jealousy and a lack of trust toward those in the Society—the accusation that they were living in luxury, etc. All these concerns contributed to eroding the strength of the Society.

An extreme solution was proposed as a result, but it would not prove viable.

Joint-Stock Company

We decided therefore to propose to the brethren the following plan:

To make a Company of Shareholders out of the “Viata” Society, and the shareholders should be only brethren, and only brethren in the present Truth, not in the one from 10 or 15 years ago. The wealth of the society is 11 million lei found in the power of those who put the money down and those to whom we still owe money. Let’s divide the 11 million lei in shares of 1,000 lei each and have 11 thousand shares. In Romania there are 4,500 brethren. Some of these are poor. But let’s say that out of them we could find 2,200 who could buy 5 shares each, in the value of 1,000 lei each, meaning 5,000 lei, out of which we would pay the debts and those who put down the money, and then the printing press will not be owned by a few brethren, but by all the brethren.

Therefore, if we could find 2,200 brethren, each with 5,000 lei, the following things could take place:

The printing shop today has about 40 thousand books, at the cost of 2.5 million lei. If the printing press would be owned by brethren, they could give the books out almost free, and if needed, even totally free. Imagine today giving 40 thousand books free, like the PHOTOGRAMMA, Volume Six and Volume One, and booklets of all kinds. Imagine the light these could pour on the darkness and how much this would advance the cause of Truth.

Remarks: (1) The editors of the magazine still believed strongly in the work that was taking place after 1916. (2) However, when they list the books that would be a light, we see that they refer to the Pastor’s books. (3) The affirmation that in Romania there were 4,500 brethren is amazing, which means that from 1923, in just three years, the number doubled.

This proposal shows the status of the Society and the way everything would function under those conditions. The intention of its promoters was good. They were sincere in what they believed and in the way in which they acted—as was demonstrated in the events that were soon to follow.

This proposal was left without any action taken. And at this point, the account of the short-lived “Viata” Society ends.

As mentioned earlier, there is a gap in documents until 1930. What happened during all this time? Two things took place with certainty. First, the leaders of the Society—Sima, Filipoiu, Ciucas—came to understand the erroneous orientation of Rutherford and the necessity of turning around 180 degrees. Second, the Society fell with resounding court cases that followed—and the entire gamut of quarrels, hate and gossip that relentlessly resulted.

How these brethren came to understand the truth regarding Rutherford’s movement . . . what the circumstances were that helped them become aware of it . . . and how hard the internal fight was for each one of them to make such a radical and definitive change—all these dynamics we do not now know. But we trust that though the struggle of those years was terrible, the peace “within the Veil” will be glorious.

Epilogue

We will direct our attention now to the message of “The Wakeup Call Addressed to All the Brethren of Romania” that came out in 1930.

The following were published in the English magazine ZION’S MESSENGER, and knowing that the authors of this magazine were co-laborers with Br. Russell and were recommended by him, we can’t doubt their affirmations, especially since some of these deeds reached our eyes and ears. (THE WAKEUP CALL, p. 1)

The Wakeup Call then reproduces the following: “The Resolution of the Polish Bible Students from America” (dated February, 1930, Detroit, Michigan); Br. Russell’s testament; the description of the way in which this was respected and—what evolved as a result—“David’s Palace,” and the conclusions.

Toward the end of the material, the Romanian editors make these statements:

We described above only some doctrines and some events from America involving the “Heads” of this organization, leaving aside the events that took place here in Romania in the fight for the “golden

calf,” finding it difficult to recall these events to memory, but we believe that if it be the Lord’s will that these facts come to light, then they will come to light, “for it is light that makes everything visible.” Eph. 5:11-13

(Editor’s Note) Knowing now from the mouth of eyewitnesses and of those who know the situation closely, the wheeling and dealing of today’s leaders of the organization, who could claim any longer that the reasons of some for division from the current leadership of the society are unscriptural, as the flier from August 1st, 1930, sent by the Magdeburg branch, says??!!...

For example, if the deeds performed by Rutherford and Co. in connection with the scandal revolving around the mammon from Cluj, when they resorted to false documents, court trials, threatening even with death and denunciations in the Court, contrary to the teachings of the Manna from May 25, in order to fill the lawyers’ pockets with millions and to put us to shame in front of the world; and as a result caused harm to all the brethren with the exception of one already mentioned (in p. 7. Par. 2). Oh well, if we continue to remain careless toward these events and toward the others described in this magazine, we will notice that in time these events will be repeated again, because if these deeds are allowed for Rutherford and his people, the weaker brethren will say: why shouldn’t these be permitted for ourselves as well?! (Ibid., p. 18,19.)

Here we see mentioned some of the trials that followed after 1926. We can realize the magnitude of these if we consider the things that occurred at that time: false documents, denunciations, threatenings, slanders, etc. All these hurt the brethren and stained the Truth in the world’s eyes. Therefore, we can understand the pain expressed in the words at the end of this magazine:

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord!

We don’t know if after the “trials” we recently went through (Eccl. 9:12) you are our friend or our enemy, but we would like to talk to you. You were probably surprised that some of the brethren, both here and in other countries, who have the same faith as you do; and their desire, like yours, is to do anything in their power for the proclamation of the kingdom of our King, declared themselves

separated from the leadership of today’s Society and began to work separately because of what they believe to be their duty to the Lord and their vow of consecration!?

If, before, you were unclear about the reasons that brought them to take this step now, if you carefully read and understood “The Wakeup Call,” we believe that it is now clear that our steps are not without scriptural reasons, as others state.... (Ibid., p.20.)

Truly, the most prominent Romanian brethren did separate from the Brooklyn Society. But the most prominent of the Hungarian brethren from Romania remained: Kiss, Szabo, M. Maghiarosi. However, Br. Beni—who played an important role among the Hungarian brethren in the period that followed—did not separate from the Society.

This division must have been extremely painful, as it was a separation between brethren and brethren. It meant renouncing the prior way of life. When we say this, we are referring to the order they had in the organization, because from then until 1990 the brethren did not form any kind of organization. In addition, it was the end of a systematic, centralized, controlled work. From that point on, everybody did what they could on their own account from individual initiative without too much support from the outside.

For that reason we believe the brethren who were able to overcome this crisis, to reorder their Christian lives and to continue to fight—even if on a more restricted scale with fewer resources below their maximum capacity and talents—these brethren are worthy of respect and honor. They encouraged themselves and encouraged others who were in a state of general discouragement and disappointment

We do not doubt that the cause of the Truth itself was questioned. All these events must have brought unfaithfulness to the weaker ones. The siftings were extremely severe.

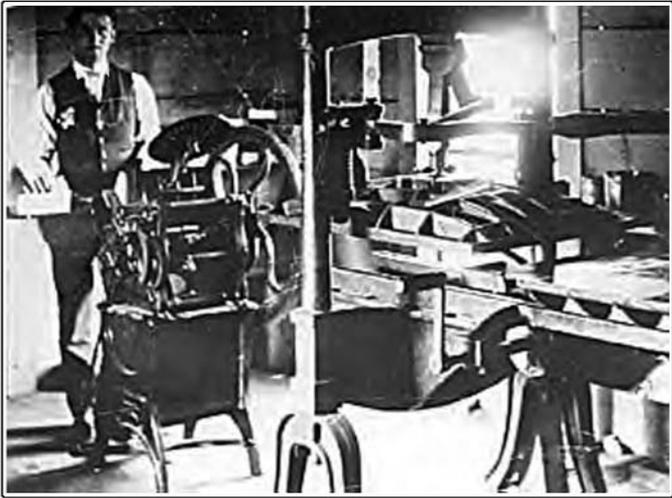
If we were to draw some conclusions regarding this period, we would say that despite the trials that followed, the Society played a positive role, at least in the early years. Note that the new printing press was finished only in 1925 and its modern construction was only of benefit for two years. The division and court trial followed. With this, many brethren sustained significant material losses. In the early years, brethren like Br. Sima, Br. Filipoiu, and other peasant brethren,

who remain anonymous, invested much in the Society. Much was invested in regards to what they owned because we have seen that the greatest part of the amount spent for the recent construction of the Press was borrowed from banks from the Occident through Rutherford. He was clever to hire the best lawyers to come out with minimal losses from the process that followed. Indeed the Jehovah’s Witnesses (as they would later call themselves) continued their work, moving their headquarters to Bucharest, taking the printing machines, printed books, and the rest of the supplies with them.

It would be difficult to know the percentage of the brethren that stayed in the Truth at the separation. Some are of the opinion that the split was somewhere in the middle.

The Society—before the painful splitting—remained for the brethren a beautiful memory. Those who served there used to recount their memories with warmth to those who would come later. Surely, a tremendous help was the printing of books in quantities never printed since. Also, the spreading of the Truth through the colporteur work, the method used by Br. Russell, was practiced a little longer after the fall of the Society, on a much smaller scale, until it totally ceased. Only recently, some timid forms of witness work are beginning to be manifest, but the colporteur work itself is a foreign thing to the majority of the brethren.

Still, the Society was an unforgettable, memorable experience for those who were involved.



*Br. Filipoiu bought an old manual printing press,
and he set it up in one sister's cellar.
Here for a year, under difficult conditions
with jeopardy of being discovered at any time,
Br. Filipoiu clandestinely printed literature.*

(Quoted from Page 43)

CHAPTER FOUR

BRINGING THEIR WORLD OUT OF CHAOS

(1930-1948)

Very little is known about the events, activities or real stories that took place during these 18 years. Available written documents refer to only four of these years—1932-1936. There are no survivors from this period of time. The memories of those who knew something about that period are not very clear. This is due in part to the war which blocks out the memory of everything else. After the end of the war, an uncertain time came when the Communist regime took over Romania’s “rights” with brutality, snatching property, and throwing the owners in prison. For the population in general, this meant the burden of paying for a huge war—dues to the USSR. All this cruelty took place during the span of nearly a decade and stopped the usual activities and normal rhythm of life. For this reason, the information we have about this period is scarce.

The year 1930 was a tumultuous year. The fall of the Society, the separation from those who would become “Jehovah’s Witnesses” on the wave of dirty court trials, slanders, false rumors of all kinds, drove many brethren to despair, disappointment, and uncertainty. Questions like: “Who are you with?” “Did you stay with Rutherford?” “Did you cross over to the other side?” were probably very common during those days. For that reason, it seems like the Lord providentially overruled that a personality like Onisim Filipoiu would be on the scene at this time. His methodical, dynamic, decisive nature was an invaluable support for the reorganization of the brethren. If we would want to give his work a fitting title, it would probably be “bringing their world out of chaos.”

Without the support of an external organization such as the Society previously had given, without money or close relationships with foreign brethren, Br. Onisim understood the necessity of continuing the activities—both through encouraging the brethren by supporting meetings and by carrying on the witness work as much as possible. We do not know what kinds of relationships were maintained with the brethren from America and other countries, if any. It is sure, though, that these gradually ceased to exist, so that by the time the Communist regime was set in power, the Romanian brethren believed themselves to be the only Bible Students left in the world.

From 1932 to 1936 Onisim Filipoiu became the main editor of the *Studies in the Scriptures* magazine. This was a monthly magazine that included articles from the *Watch Tower*, taken and translated from the German magazine *Der Herold*. Starting with the fourth issue of the magazine, Br. Filipoiu began to translate and include parts of Volume V. From January 1933 to August 1935, the entire Volume V was published in these magazines.

In the second issue of the magazine, Br. Onisim announced the printing of the first six chapters of Volume VI, which were also translated from German. These were bound together and could be ordered by anybody.

Another announcement that can be seen once in a while in the pages of this magazine was that of the availability of calendars. These calendars were not in the form that we generally think of today. They were in the form of a book, including both articles of general culture as well as articles of a religious nature. The calendars were used in the witness work as the following ad urges:

Many holidays are about to come, therefore use these occasions. Take all the magazines and study them carefully. Then after you have partaken of these fat things and have drunk of the sweet drinks, look at what Nehemiah 8:10 says and then use the calendars for that purpose, they are prepared for those with a thirsty heart who hunger after the bread and water of life. (STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, Dec. 1932, p. 36)

The magazine's financial status is shown in the following announcement:

We have to understand that the magazine has no other means of support than subscriptions and voluntary gifts. The times are hard and the resources are in short supply, which we want to use for printing "Volume Six," the unpublished part. (Ibid., p. 132.)

The magazine was published in Arad at the Erdelyi Hirlap, a publishing house, for a year and then in Sibiu at a publishing house called Iosif Schmidt.

In the magazine's last year, in addition to articles from *Der Herold*, the editor introduced an interpretation of Revelation, the source of which is unknown. "*Starting with January 1936, if it is the Lord's will and if He will help us, we have decided to publish the newest and we believe the most correct interpretation of Revelation.*" (Ibid., p. 252.)

In December 1936, the last issue of the magazine was published. We do not know exactly why the activity ceased at that time. It is very possible that Br. Filipoiu encountered obstacles from the priests and authorities that prohibited him from continuing the activity.

Another remarkable activity—performed at great risk—took place in the village of Sadu in Sibiu County. Br. Filipoiu bought an old manual printing press, and he set it up in one sister's cellar. Here for a year, under difficult conditions with jeopardy of being discovered at any time, Br. Filipoiu clandestinely printed literature. We do not know exactly what was printed—it is possible that it was Volume VI. However, this activity became overly risky and was stopped after one year. (More details about this activity are found in the Memoirs section dedicated to the Filipoiu family. See p. 69.)

However, this is the last systematic and sustained attempt, which the publishing of a magazine would undoubtedly require, to print and spread the Truth in Romania from that time until 1990.

Still, although publishing and printing ceased—on a smaller scale in a smaller area—the colporteur activity quietly continued to spread the Truth.



**A Meeting During Communism
Manastireni 1965 (Near Cluj)**

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COMMUNIST PERIOD — TRIALS AND BLESSINGS

To realistically describe the Communist period and its effect on the brethren's lives precisely and objectively with all of its aspects—would be an impossible task. Therefore, the complete record is left in our Heavenly Father's hands.

However, we would resort to observing that it left deep marks on any person living through it, bringing about a revolution in the personality of that individual, in his way of perceiving things, of thinking, and acting. Sometimes these marks go beyond the limitations of the conscious mind.

Communism wanted to create not only a new political ideology, a new economy, a new social structure, but also a DIFFERENT MAN from the one who had existed before. This new political ideology dug into the human soul—into its inmost fibers of faith in God. Communism alleged that atheism was the way to this NEW MAN.

The Communists started acting on these beliefs as soon as they came to power. They began by “cleaning out” the religious groups. Outside of the Orthodox, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Adventist churches, almost all others were declared illegal.

What did this mean on the practical side? Meetings in small or big numbers, preaching, witnessing, and printing were strictly prohibited. Even owning religious literature at home would put one in danger.

These new and pressing circumstances brought about changes inside the Bible Students' movement as well.

Under the New Auspices

Although with the brethren some things continued to be the same, many aspects developed with new dimensions.

The love for the Truth, for *The Studies in the Scriptures*, and for the brethren did not change. On the contrary, this love under severe trials only shone all the brighter. The Truth became more precious because by holding on to it, one was risking his or her freedom. *The Studies in the Scriptures* became more valuable as the possibility of obtaining them became more difficult and as the risk of losing them in the eventuality of an official house search became greater. The meetings with the brethren became sweeter as the need for stricter confidentiality increased and these meetings became less accessible.

Other issues were emerging, too. The witness work, as the first generation of Romanian Bible Students enjoyed, was no longer practicable. First, it was strictly forbidden, and second, there was no literature available for distribution. The small quantities of literature available were not enough even for the brethren.

The meetings also changed their character in the sense that discourses started to gradually replace the studies. In addition, almost all the classes in Romania began to practice that which was called the "prayer hour." This service consisted of a praise service, which took place in the first part of the meeting, where brethren spoke about the importance of prayer, scripture texts and *Mannas* were read, and then it would end with prayers by a few brothers and sisters.

Another new aspect was abandoning the election of elders. This was due in part to the fact that authorities were especially hunting for the "heads," the leaders of the meetings. For this reason, at every meeting, the brethren who were to serve were elected on the spot.

The conventions coincided with the Communist holidays: May 1, August 23, and with the winter holidays, Christmas and New Year's. Usually they took place in isolated places like forests or



**The Valley of the Cherry Tree
(1970, Near Sighet)**

houses in the backstreets in the area of Cluj, the Almas Valley, and also in Sighet, a region where the control of the authorities was weaker and the people in general benefited from more freedom than in other parts of the country. At these occasions, the participating brethren were even three or four hundred.

Here, for example, is how one of the sisters describes a New Year's meeting:

We would stay all night in the house where the meeting was held so we would not be seen during the night. We would meet in the evening at 8 P.M. and would stay till morning at 5 or 6 A.M. There were brethren from the entire country. Sometime during these nights about 12 brethren would give discourses, each for 1/2 hour. When somebody would be really sleepy he/she would request a song and we would sing it immediately.

We would also find short moments to open the windows to let fresh air in, because the rooms were small and packed, having about 15 crammed people seated on one bed, so they couldn't even

move. For that reason while we were singing we would stand up to stretch and remove the numbness. But we were able to stay awake because the speakers would change fairly often.

Another sister tells about the conventions in the woods:

These meetings were usually in the summer. The brethren were looking for more isolated places, in the heart of the forest. I remember some of these meetings we had in the “Capus Valley” at approximately 20-25 km (12-15 miles) from Cluj. Another time about 100 to 150 brethren would meet in the Paniceni-Aghires area.

The brethren in the closest village/city were considered the host class. They would bring food for all the brethren. The sisters would prepare pies, donuts, homemade bread, sheep cheese, lard, onions, radishes, tomatoes, boiled eggs, and Br. Nelu Galis would bring honey from his beehives. The host sisters would bring tablecloths woven by hand and lay them on the grass for an area of 10-12 m (33-43 feet) or even more in length. They would place the food on them and the brethren would sit cross-legged as they ate, talked, and shared experiences. These were truly hours of refuge and escape from the shackles of Communism.

The Privilege of Funerals

Funerals deserve a very special place in the memoirs of this book. Despite their mournful character, funerals were considered occasions of reunion and joy for the brethren. When a more prominent brother would die, the funeral would transform into a true convention. These special occasions were generally tolerated by the authorities—with the admission that the deceased must be buried. In addition, it would have been too obvious an abuse to pass over the preferences of the mourning family. Therefore, the brethren took full advantage of these privileges. The funeral would last 2-3 hours and three or four brethren would give discourses.

Consequently, funerals were an excellent way of witnessing and probably the only way at that time. This traditional custom in Romania gave the funeral service special attention—especially in the villages. Many times the entire population of the village would

be present, and on this occasion, the people would be especially willing to listen. People had a general thirst for holy words about God—as generated, no doubt, by the rage of Communism against religion. Therefore, most of the participants appreciated the divine message.

So funerals usually took place in a peaceful environment. However, there were exceptions. One brother remembers one of these situations as follows:

“During a burial service, we were told that the Security Force [See page 87] was awaiting us in the village. Therefore, from the burial place we didn’t return to the village, but we went over the hills and went home.”

One sister says: *“We didn’t miss a funeral because there we would see the brethren. And there we usually didn’t have fear. I know though, that one time in Finisel, the village priest slapped Br. Intea. The priest had asked him why he went to bury the dead. Br. Intea answered without fear and then the priest slapped him.”*

The Increasing Need for Literature

But the thorniest problem was literature—or more precisely—the lack of it. As we mentioned earlier, the printing of religious books was strictly forbidden and sanctioned very severely. In fact, it was forbidden to own a typewriter in your house or any other machine that would facilitate the printing and distribution of literature.

And still the need for books was increasing. Many classes did not even have a complete set of *The Studies in the Scriptures*. The few books available were exchanged between brethren and they would take turns in studying them. When one of the brethren would get his or her hands on a Volume, he or she would not put it down until it was read from cover to cover, even if sleeping at night had to be sacrificed. Several brethren copied entire Volumes by hand. Sr. Verona from Manastireni paid somebody to copy it because she did not know how to write. Such a solution was expensive. But she obtained the money by selling her hair scarves made out of camel hair (which were considered a precious part of a girl’s dowry).



Gheorghe Budiu
(1905-1991)

praise—not only before the brethren but also, we believe, before God. One of these brethren was Br. Budiu.

A close friend of his, Br. Nicolae Zoicas, tells us about him:

I met him for the first time in 1967. That year a historic event took place, which had a strong psychological impact on me and my wife. I was 25 years old at that time. That was the year of our consecration as a result of Br. Budiu's visit in Baia-Mare. The Six Day War between the Jews and Arabs had just ended as a result of Israel's overwhelming victory. Br. Budiu convinced me through

a series of prophecies that this nation's destiny was especially directed by the hand of God.

I don't know how Br. Budiu found the Truth, but I know that he is originally from the Arad area, and he was a colporteur with Br. Onisim Filipoiu.

From what he told me about his life, I know that he worked as a typing clerk at the court in Bistrita, where he was eventually terminated because of his religious activity. They gave him two choices: to remain in the clerk job or to remain in Christ. He chose the second. A Jewish doctor helped him to obtain a disability pension and, with this small pension, he completely dedicated himself to writing and participating in the pilgrim work.

Br. Budiu was not a great orator, but with much tenacity and perseverance he contributed considerably in consolidating the truth principles in the small classes and strengthening isolated brothers and sisters. He had a strong persuasive talent, and a rational and lucid mind. He would not waste his time with futile talk. However, he was happy, jovial, and a good singer. When he came to visit, he would always have his bag full of typed hymns and tidbits of truth. It is a pleasure for me to recall memories of him because he was for me like a spiritual mentor.

I know that he spent many days and entire nights in front of his typewriter translating literature. He contributed in translating Br. Russell's works from French. We do not know where he obtained his French Volumes, but he told me that he translated them using dictionaries, he himself not knowing French very well. In this way he translated for the brethren the following Volumes: I, II, III, IV.

The brethren in Romania had in Br. Budiu the only brother who contributed to distributing the seed of the Truth with his pen during Communism.

Br. Budiu's activity was extremely beneficial for the brethren. He developed next to the people working at the Society and was accustomed to colportering, printing, and distributing literature, and doing intense activity in the service of the Truth. By the Lord's grace, he maintained this momentum during the Communist years. He would also type at his typewriter—making five carbon copies at once—which he would then distribute to the brethren. The fifth copy was almost illegible, very tiring for the eyes. But the brother

aBvato de Babilonul abtă nusal în trecut,
 Israelul trage în dus captiv în Babilonul
 literal, Aflat, pe cind în virsta evange-
 elică, Babilonul mistic sau simbolic care a
 dus în captivitate pe Israelul spiritual, ea
 te descrie ca fiind așezat pe Aflatul mist-
 ic. În tip, uselte de aur ale templului au
 fost transportate la Babilon și profanate;
 în anti tip, prețioasele și dumnezeieștile ad-
 evăruri (simbolizate prin aur), aparținând
 serviciului adevăratului templu, Biserica (I
 Cor. 3;16,17, Apoc. 3;12), au fost transpor-
 tate departe de locul lor, falsificate și pro-
 fanate de Babilonul mistic. Babilonul litoc-
 răl fiind zidit pe râul Aflat, care contri-
 buia materialicește la bogțiile și resursele
 lui, prebușirea lui a fost adusă prin schim-
 barea cursului apelor sale. Intocmai la fel,
 Babilonul mistic este așezat pe ape mari (pe-
 peare, națiuni) și susținut de ele; și căde-
 rea lui este prezisă prin schimbarea cursului
 susținătoarelor și proptelelor lui, popular.
 (Apoc. 16;12, 9;13-14, Dan: 5;1-4, 22-23).

TIMPURI PARALELE CARE MASCARA
 UMBRA ȘI SUBSTANȚA LUCRURILOR
 - SAU TIPUL ȘI ANTI TIPUL.

414. Vom examina acum cea mai minunată
 din trăsăturile acestei corespondențe tipice:
 adică elemental timp care, în fiecare exemplu
 sustine și interese datele indicate de jubileu,
 cronologie și prezicerea sfârșitului timpurilor
 necunoscător.



Maria and Vasile Intea
(b. 1935) (b. 1927)

or sister who received even that copy would feel very privileged to be among the five. He traveled extensively and was not afraid to witness whenever he would have the privilege. All these activities were very risky at the time, but we do not doubt that the benefits to the brethren—and before the Lord—were far greater than the risks involved.

Another brother who contributed to the printing of literature was Br. Vasile Intea. Br. Intea, always very active, is well known in Romania even till today. Although not young anymore, Br. Intea, together with his wife, Sr. Maria, faithfully still visit the brethren, encouraging the sick and the isolated.

During Communism, through one of his neighbors who was a binder at the University Press on Puskin Street, Br. Intea found a method to print religious literature. In this way he was able to print 275 copies of Volume V (the large format), 2,500 hymnbooks, 2,500 *Mannas* and a small number of the booklets, “*What is Truth?*”

Br. Intea also typed at his typewriter 17 copies of Volume V (small format) and 35 copies of Volume III. These books were true heavenly gifts for the brethren.

Religion Called an “Opiate of the People”

Education of the Truth in the family—or rather its deficiencies in this respect—explains in a way the numerical differences between the older generation and the middle-aged generation. (See the graphical representation on the following pages.) Of course, this factor does not account for everything.

Under Communism, if one were part of a Protestant religious group, access to higher education was more difficult—sometimes even impossible. Therefore, some brethren did not train their children to know the Truth in order to avoid these obstacles.

Here is an account of one sister who went to a university during that time:

As a student I was denounced as being a part of an illegal sect. I was called to the dean’s office. Everybody was on the alert because of me. I told them that I was a believer, but not part of a sect. However, they continued to supervise me closely... When I was about to take an oral exam for the Scientific Socialism class, the teacher did not let me treat the subject on the ticket I pulled out, but rather wanted me to elaborate on Marx’s statement: “Religion is the opiate of the people.” He wasn’t satisfied by my answer and he failed me, saying, “Go home, change your conception about life and come back to take the exam.” When I went the second time, he failed me again. He maintained that I was a danger for the children, that I could corrupt them with my ideas. Only the third time he agreed to give me the minimum grade. But he continued to watch me all through my university student years.

The intellectuals, such as professors in the educational system, were tracked and hunted meticulously by the Communists. They were always being suspected of promoting ideas and concepts that were foreign to the regime. Therefore, the universities were controlled with severity, spies being placed at all levels.

Here is another report by one of the brethren:

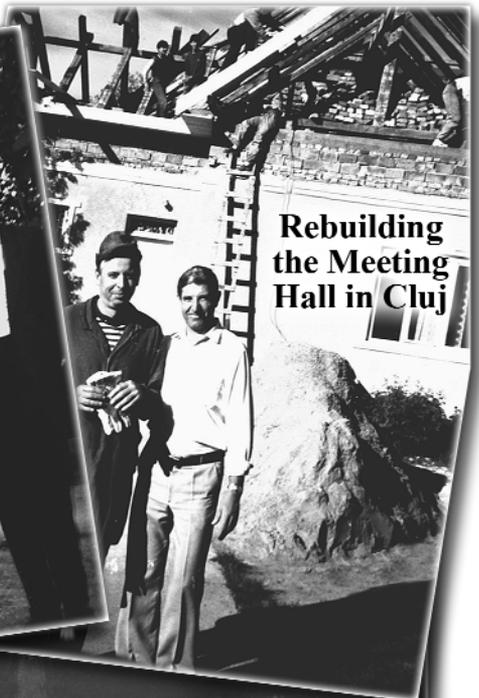
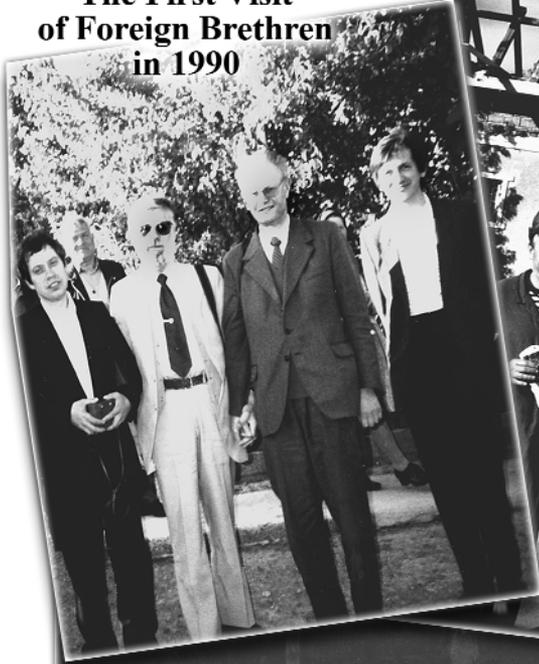
There were political organizations like U.T.C. (The Union of the Communist Youth) in which you were obligated to become a member. I refused to subscribe to these atheistic organizations. One time, the secretary of the organization came to ask me why I didn't sign up. He started to ask me what I believed, and we talked for about an hour. I told him all I believed and why I could not sign up—because what this organization promoted was against my beliefs. At the end he congratulated me for my beliefs. He asked me if I had microphones hidden in the walls that could be used against him later. I calmed him down by telling him that I certainly did not. This was a happy scenario but not all ended that well. In general, the people were part of a Communist organization.

About Communism—or more exactly about the lives of those who lived through it—much more could be said! A fuller picture will in some measure be enhanced hopefully through the reports from the second part of this book.

*“And ye shall
know the truth,
and the truth shall
make you free...
If the Son therefore
shall make you
free, ye shall be
free indeed.”*

John 8:32, 38

**The First Visit
of Foreign Brethren
in 1990**



**International Convention
Poitiers, France in 1994**

CHAPTER SIX

THE ACTIVITY SINCE 1990

New Horizons Open

Who could understand the joy of the prisoner on the day of his liberation—or of the slave on the first day of his emancipation?

There are no adequate words to express the feelings caused by the spectacular fall of the Communist regime in Romania and the incredible change that resulted.

Unforgettable are the emotions with which we lived through the Revolution: the flight of Ceausescu . . . the revolts of the population . . . the massacres in cities throughout the country . . . the public conquering of television . . . the capture and execution of the dictator . . . the first free elections after 45 years of trickery . . . the opening of the country's frontiers to the world. The days had blossomed into a continuous celebration of enthusiasm and unrestrained and boundless joy. All hearts were revived with hope, aspirations for freedom, happiness and well-being. Big smiles showed on faces that for a long time had known only sadness, resignation, and sighing.

In that enthusiastic atmosphere, you could easily imagine the joy of mankind coming out of the Time of Trouble—freed from the jaws of sin and death and led toward the fulfillment of the most noble ideals ever desired by man.

In Romania, the first directly televised revolution was at the top of the international media news for a long time. Romania, a small country lost for so long in the Communist world, suddenly became famous, stirring up the interest and the affection of world opinion.

All these exalted feelings and expectations did not last long. Ten years after the Revolution, Romanians were confronted with a general state of apathy, skepticism, a lack of contentment, and a lack of trustfulness. Feelings prevailed that animated a population which had been deceived by every government that succeeded, disgusted by corruption of the political class, disappointed by the arbitration and diplomatic games of the international organizations.

But what did this mean for the brethren?

In a short time, this extraordinary news spread among us: WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THE WORLD! Suddenly, we at once found that we had brethren in other parts of the world: in the United States, France, Germany, Poland. Then we found out about the Moldovan brethren—which in itself was a different story—then about so many, many other countries where we had brethren!!!

In the spring of 1990 we received the first visit of foreign brethren. For many, this first direct contact meant almost a miracle! It was certainly a historical moment. We were visited by our brethren from the West and to our great amazement and happiness we had THE SAME FAITH! Br. Gregory Bologa, Moldovan in origin and a native speaker of Romanian, but for many years a citizen of the U.S., and Br. Adolphe Debski, from France, were the pioneers of this new era—the era of integration in the worldwide community of the brethren!

Br. Adolphe Debski recounts:

For a good decade, the Romanian brethren have been present in our hearts and minds. However, it has not always been the same. A good part of the 20th century, we had no knowledge that the brethren were praising God in Romania as well...

Then a day came when things changed and in the first months of the year 1990, we received a message from the brethren at the Dawn who asked me if I would like to accompany Br. Gregory Bologa, whom they were sending to Romania in answer to the request of the Romanian brethren for a visit.

Surprise! There were brethren in Romania, and they requested to be visited. We responded affirmatively and communicated the news to the brethren in France at a convention. Following our surprise came a strong attachment, which has not yet let us down...

Br. Tompa hosted us for the first night. The second day in the morning, two sisters from Cluj brought roses for us. A sister from Ulciug (a village in the country rather far from Cluj) baked bread especially for us and, together with her husband, brought it for us.

In the afternoon, the first meeting took place at the home of Br. Intea, in Cluj. About 100 brothers and sisters of different ages came. ... Then the questions followed, emphasizing the spirit of the brethren: How many brethren were in France? How many in other countries? What are these countries? How many are currently accepting the Truth? How should we interpret this? In what phase of the harvest are we? What lesson should we extract from the coming and the fall of Communism? What is the attitude of the different Christian confessions toward us? Etc. ...

In the history of the Romanian brethren, a page was turned to reveal another one, which they are now writing, but this time not alone, but together with the brothers and sisters God gave them, the ones from other countries.

A sister from Romania declares:

For me the news that there are brethren of the same faith as ours in other countries was one of the happiest events in my life.

From this opening of our door, a succession of visits followed. And many could give a witness about the joys and the blessings these brethren brought to us. New horizons were opened before us through these visits, such as contributions of more knowledge of the Truth to which we did not have access previously. We were encouraged to cultivate occasions for meditation—and were also enlarged in certain ideas and attitudes.

Following is considered the current status of the community of brethren in Romania—regarding the number and the geographical distribution of the brethren. The structure by age and gender suggest a phenomenon that could allow us to see some tendencies and evolutions for the near future. Then we would bring our attention to the changes brought about by the new political regime, the establishment of a Bible Students Association and changes in the structure of different classes regarding their organization and functioning. The explosion of local conventions during the entire summer is in itself a separate subject. The complex problem of literature will also be treated separately, as well as the witness work that is currently taking place in Romania.

Numbers and Geographical Distribution

The number of the brethren in Romania is estimated to be approximately 1,000. The overwhelming majority of 98% is in Transylvania, grouped around three major centers: Cluj-Napoca, Baia-Mare, and Sighetu-Marmatiei, about 50 localities in all, out of which 11 are urban and the rest rural. (See the map on page 142.)

The largest classes are in Cluj, Calinesti, and Cucerdea—each with about 80 members. Also, a high concentration of the brethren is in the rural Almas Valley.

Structure by Age and Gender

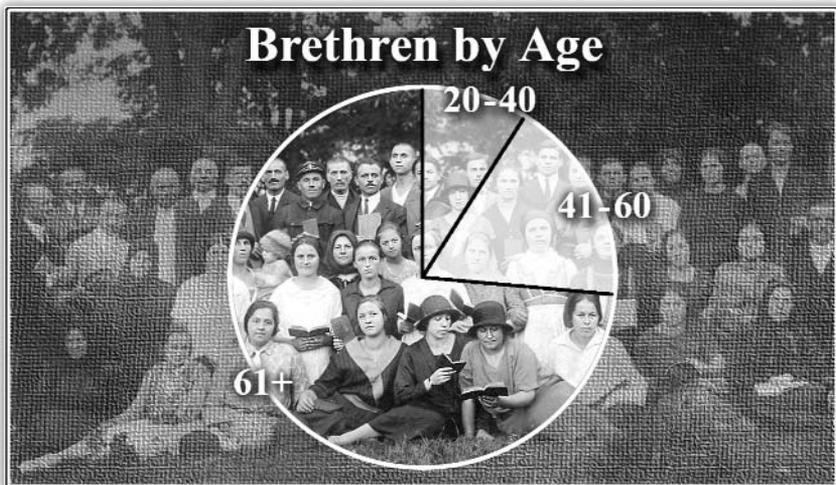
A report of the distribution by age of the brethren in the country is interesting:

Out of an estimated 950 brethren, numbers are divided as follows:

- 83 are between 20-40 years (8.80%)
- 167 are between 41-60 years (17.70%)
- 693 are over 61 (73.48%)

Representing this distribution (circa 2001) graphically is striking:

A phenomenon that is probably not as common in other parts of the world is the predomination of sisters in the rural classes. For example, in the two large classes—Cucerdea and Calinesti—we have 65 sisters and 5 brothers, and 70 sisters and 10 brothers, respectively. The picture is very much the same in other classes.



The questions arise: What is the cause of this phenomenon? Why is this only in the villages? A possible answer would be the high level of alcoholism among the men in rural environments. But there are more causes that contribute toward this phenomenon.

Possible Trends for the Romanian Brethren

Some possible conclusions might be drawn from interpretation of this data. In collaboration with other information also, some predictions might be suggested concerning the big picture of the community of brethren in the not-too-distant future.

The average life expectancy in Romania is 65 for men and 71 for women. Three quarters of the brethren are above 61 years of age, which means many deaths in succession, a trend we are confronted with already which will be increased in the coming years.

Every year new members are added to some classes, either young ones that were born and grew up in Bible Student families, or as a result of the witness work—but in general their number is small. In addition, among the young people there is the emigration issue—which has multiple causes. Stopping or slowing this trend down beyond a certain normal rate—does not seem hopeful as long as the economic situation remains the same.

As a result of all these factors, how will the Bible Students community in Romania look in—let us say—ten years from now?

Some predictions might be made. In ten years, considering the above data, many of the 74% of the older brethren will finish their course. Then taking into account the emigration among the younger generation, the 9% of young people (between 20-40 years) will only decrease. The very young ones (18-25 years old) constitute about 4%. The middle category, the 18%, will remain somewhat stable. So, what is left after the many subtractions of this equation? We find at least two results after we calculate the numbers: the massive diminution of the Bible Student community (either through deaths or through emigration) and the accelerated aging of it.

Even though this is not a very cheerful picture, we think it is not an unusual situation when we compare it to the worldwide circumstances among the brethren—perhaps with a few exceptions. In any case, these trends must be in harmony with the general direction of the Harvest today—which is coming to a close.

Our times are in His hands. He knows.

Changes, changes...

Several specific changes have taken place since 1990.

The Association

In 1990 at a meeting where brethren from the entire country participated, the conclusion was reached that the establishment of an association was necessary, in a precise and limited scope, for printing literature. So a legal administrative unit was formed, which proved its usefulness through the years. The Association resolved the issue of literature among the brethren and at the same time was the instrument used in the distribution of literature for the witness work.

The Elections of Elders

A short time after the Revolution, many classes from Romania reached the conclusion that the election of elders was necessary.

In the classes where the age distribution was somewhat balanced, a detailed study of the subject was undertaken, which was followed by elections. But certain classes where the average age was older could not perceive the need for these elections.

The Studies and the Discourses

Although before the Revolution discourses were predominant, the importance of Berean study was increased afterwards. But studies were only emphasized where the brethren voted in observance of “Order and Discipline” of Volume VI.

The quality of discourses was also improved. They seemed to have more of an ordered structure with a theme and a common thread—characteristics that previously had only happened incidentally.

The Conventions

The freedom to meet under the new democratic regime was exploited in full by the brethren. Every year from May to October there are weekly or semi-monthly local conventions. Brethren in the host locality, whether few or many, take care of the organization and sponsorship. For example, in Nimigea (Bistrita-Nasaud) we have only one sister. She saves money during the year so she will not miss the chance of inviting the brethren for a convention to her house every year. Because these conventions occur in the summer and most of the time in villages, they take place in gardens or front yards, in open air. When a

summer rain happens in the Lord's providence—conventions take on a new dimension with very creative accommodations!

The Witness Work

Organized witness work continues to appear somewhat unclear and not essential for most of the Romanian brethren. For this reason, systematic on-going witnessing projects have not yet been organized.

However, there are brethren who clearly understand that today is different from yesterday, that now it is a very special time for spreading the Divine message. These brethren have dedicated much of their time and talents in this direction. Due to these very few brethren, truths regarding the present time, Israel, the Harvest, etc., have reached the ears of the people in the Protestant churches. So from the pages of local newspapers, the Harvest Truth has gone into the hands of thousands and thousands of people. God will surely reward their efforts!

The Literature

Having a new and complete set of *Studies in the Scriptures* was an unspeakable joy for the brethren.

Two active centers for the printing of literature were created—the first one in Cluj and the second one in Sighet. Because it was noticed that previous translations of brochures and tracts—and even the Volumes—were lacking in quality, brothers and sisters have dedicated years of their lives to translation, printing and distribution of this literature. This enormous work would not have been possible without first looking to the LORD for wisdom and strength by a completely dedicated team of brethren.

So only the end of the century has brought the wealth of literature with which it started.

* * *

With more or less subjectivity, we conclude this historical narrative and explanation of the Bible Student movement in Romania. We hope it has met a certain scope for giving a general understanding about the way the Bible Student movement in Romania has evolved from its dawning to the present. At the same time, this PART ONE is meant to present the historical background for the Testimonies that follow.



Prison in Sighetu Marmatiei

*“And prisons would palaces prove,
If Jesus still dwelt with me there.”*

Hymns of Dawn, 94

PART TWO

MEMORIES OF A GENERATION

The experiences of those who suffered in prison, risking their freedom for the Truth and the brethren, cannot be erased from the history of humanity.

Their lives stand as witnesses for us who live in a new era radically different from the previous ones. Their stories tell us how the faith can be kept through completely unfavorable circumstances. It is for us to learn how the same faith must also be kept under completely favorable conditions. (Who knows if today's experiences are not even more difficult for faithfulness than those in earlier years?) These witnesses also testify to us that faith is not a passive state, but is active, all-consuming, risky—and full of strife, hard work, sacrifice, and finally . . . victory.

Some of these brethren have finished their course, others are on their way.

May the Lord be their “exceeding great reward”!



Elena and Iacob Filipoiu
(Born 1915) (1905-1985)

FIRST MEMOIR

“THE BEST OF THE BEST”

THE FILIPOIU BROTHERS — RODNA VECHÉ

A daughter of one of the brethren from the interwar period qualifies the leaders of this generation as being: “The Best of the Best.” Onisim Filipoiu and his brother Iacob are a couple of the representatives of choice. Their high moral standards, sobriety, zeal, and intellectual capacity have left a deep impression on those with whom they came in contact. So this Filipoiu family represents the interwar generation, who were especially active in this period.

Elena Filipoiu, 92, lives in Sibiu and is still active and alert. She is the one who provided the information about what the Filipoiu family meant for the Truth movement in Romania. She did this with much modesty and meekness, stating often that what they did is not important. But what is important is the testimonies of brethren’s examples in their faith—both in their lives and sharing of the Word. Since we need examples, we take Apostle Paul because he was one who truly suffered with Christ. With much difficulty, we were able to assure her that if Paul remains a standard for our Christian life, it is not less true that we need to know the experiences of other brethren from whom we can receive strength and courage.

At that point, she thought and replied that it was possible that we, the younger generation, will go through more difficult experiences because the hardest times are yet to come. For that reason, we assured

her that learning about their example would be an inspiration for us in the trials that are yet ahead.

From the information collected from Sr. Elena, we put together a history. Let us follow the story of the Filipoiu family, which was identified for decades with the history of the Truth in Transylvania.

In Rodna Veche, in Bistrita-Nasaud County, the Filipoiu family, Orthodox for generations, was known as one of the more esteemed families in the village. Six boys were born to them, two of whom went to the university. One became a lawyer in Budapest, and the other an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army.

Captain Onisim Filipoiu was highly appreciated by his superiors due to his ability to treat soldiers appropriately, kindly, or strictly, as the situation required. He was nominated for promotion, but in World War I, he was slightly wounded and was taken to the hospital. There he requested a Bible to read, and a Baptist in a neighboring room offered one to him. The latter took advantage of the situation to share his faith. Captain Filipoiu embraced it rapidly, resigned from the army, and returned home, to the great disappointment of his father.

Onisim's brother from Budapest was moved by his gesture and decided to follow him. However, back in Budapest, he was poisoned by the Hungarians in their great fury against the unification of the three Romanian principalities—which was taking place at that time (1918)—and against the Romanian intellectual lawyer who fought in favor of it.

In his zeal for the faith, Onisim Filipoiu made 70 disciples in his village, Rodna Veche. But soon, through some relatives from Bistrita, he got in touch with the Bible Student brethren and came in contact with Br. Ciucas from Ileanda. The character and knowledge of this brother impressed Onisim, and in the two weeks Br. Ciucas spent at his home, he was fully established in the Truth. Onisim brought his newly accepted ideas to those 70 disciples, and some accepted them as the truth.

Iacob Filipoiu was the next family member who chose to live by faith, and then, gradually, the other brothers. Iacob married Elena in 1935 and, for a while, they lived in the village of Sadu in Sibiu County.

Sr. Elena had been orphaned at a young age and was raised by her sister, Elisabeta. They both embraced the Truth and a small class was formed in Sadu. These are the circumstances in which



Onisim Filipoiu
(1887-1948)

Elena grew up, and she testifies that she appreciated the Truth since she was 12.

It was in Elisabeta's home that Onisim Filipoiu set up a small print shop. A false floor covered an access to the basement where the printing press was hidden. When someone entered the house, Elisabeta would signal by knocking on the false floor so they would stop the press because it was primitive and noisy.

These events happened during the 1930s when the Orthodox priesthood was making the laws and was punishing and throwing different groups of Protestants into prison, according to their pleasure.

The printing activity did not last long; however, it was sufficient for the printing of Volume VI, previously translated by Br. Onisim from the German language. He also translated articles from the German magazine *Der Herold*, articles that were integrated into Volume V, which is known among the brethren as “the big Volume V.” This was published in Arad and then in Sibiu between 1932-1936. After printing became illegal, they acquired and set up a small clandestine printing press in Sadu.

In this period, they also printed calendars that included a short article of Truth. Bros. Onisim and Iacob, accompanied by Elena,

traveled through villages distributing them and telling whoever was willing to listen about the Kingdom of God. More than once they were captured by police, and priests who would take their calendars and mock them. However, they were not discouraged. They had other hidden provisions of literature, which they took, and continued on their way.

Br. Onisim carried on his pilgrim work. Not having a family, he was able to consecrate to the cause of Christ all the time, talents, and material goods at his disposal. He would visit the brethren everywhere, encouraging them through the unmovable faith that radiated from his energetic and firm personality.

After World War II, Br. Onisim moved to Turda to live with Br. Cotu. There he was arrested and sent to prison; but being sick from an earlier accident he had had, he soon died in the hospital.

Nevertheless, Br. Onisim has remained in the memory of the brethren. Even those who did not personally know him recount with love and respect the life of him who translated, published, and preached the Truth, endured deprivations of food and clothing, and suffered persecutions, making his life an example of a living sacrifice.

We believe in our hearts that God rewarded his efforts and the deeds of his faith.

Later we found someone else who knew Br. Onisim well and could complete this picture: Br. Iosif Ilies from Mintiu, in Bistrita-Nasaud County. He agreed to write out his memories of Br. Filipoiu, which we reproduce here even at the risk of repeating some of the things already mentioned.

The first time I saw him, I was 8 or 9 years old. I was at the meeting in Feldru where I went with my mom, who was a believer.

When we entered the house, Br. Filipoiu was talking. And I remember that, even though I was a child, I was not bored, and I didn't fall asleep because the way he presented the Truth was so beautiful and lively; this is because Br. Onisim had a gift from God for preaching.

Truly, he knew how to combine words, speaking with so much passion and zeal that I thought I was seeing an angel of God. Dear sister, I am now over 70 years old, about the same age as your

grandfather, but I cannot forget those moments which were engraved in my memory concerning Br. Onisim.

He came from a family from Rodna Veche, and they were six brothers. It was a wealthy family, their father being the mayor of the village his entire life. Br. Onisim and another brother of his went on to receive higher education and became educated intellectual people. Br. Onisim was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, and his brother became the prefect of the Solnoc city in Hungary. He was then assassinated by his enemies out of jealousy that a Romanian from Transylvania had become the prefect of a Hungarian city.

Then Br. Onisim took off his military coat because he received the faith from the Hungarian and Romanian brethren who came from America. He went to his father's house, who proposed to him to take over the entire administration of his household. Onisim answered that he could not do that because he had a more important work to do. But because his father kept insisting, he said: "Father, don't be upset with me! I agree to do your will for one year."

So, he became the administrator of the household for a year. Ion Filipoiu, one of his brothers, recounts how, one day, Onisim gathered everybody together and made a work plan by days, weeks, and months, for a year. "We had never seen anything like that before," Br. Ion said. Then Onisim said, "Don't think that you will play truant, skip work, and waste time. The load is small and can be easily accomplished." When we started the work, every one of us was thinking how to finish faster, because we didn't want to go through the shame of having him rebuke us.

So it is that before the year was over we finished all the work that was planned. The father said then, "I was the administrator of this household my entire life, but I have never been as successful as Onisim."

When that year came to an end, Br. Onisim asked his father for his part of the inheritance. He sold everything and with the money he obtained, he went to the Society in Cluj and deposited all the money to be used in the cause of the Truth. He stayed there till the end of the Society, but I don't know what kind of

work he performed—probably not a minor one, because he knew German and Hungarian and had a great talent for writing.

After the Society fell apart, he continued to write and print Volume V, calendars in the form of a book, with various kinds of advertising and ideas for natural medicine—very useful knowledge even for the world.

I know that for awhile he worked clandestinely in Sibiu in an improvised basement. He translated and printed there, having for food only cornmeal and water. But he was happy that he could do something for the use of the brethren and did not complain; his face always radiated a joyful light.

He never married, like the Apostle Paul, being engaged to the Lord unto his death. He spent all his wealth in the service of the Truth, as Br. Russell. I remember that he had an interest in the poor brethren who had children and difficulties and gave them useful advice. He would urge brethren who were well off to be generous. He would visit the brethren to see how they lived, what problems they had, and gave them appropriate spiritual encouragement.

He also worked in Turda, where he had a printing press at Br. Iacob Domide’s. Some of his sisters were colporteurs, one in Rodna and two in Nasaud. These I knew, but there were others as well.

Anyway, Br. Onisim was consumed in his work. He had a bright mind. When he traveled, he would take a brother with him and would start asking him questions, as they had agreed ahead of time. The people around them could thus hear about God and His plan. Br. Onisim always answered with Scripture texts.

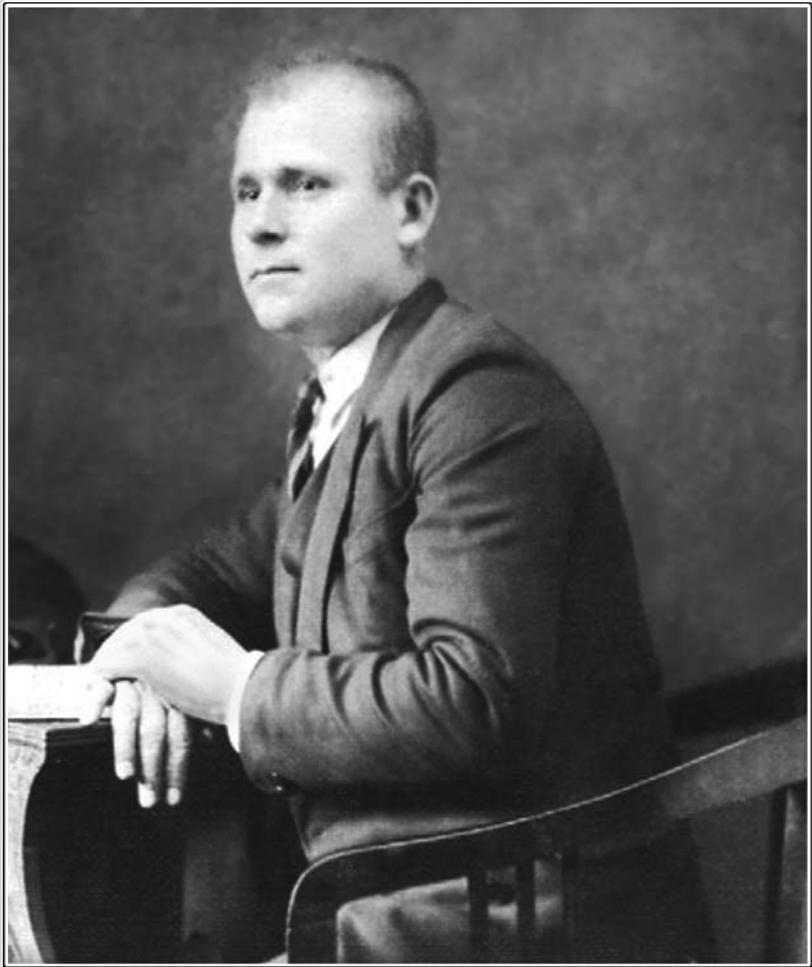
When he would visit the classes and notice problems, he would talk to the elders and with the entire class. For example, he would tell the brethren that when they go to meetings they should wear clean clothes; at that time, they were wearing linen shirts. They had to be clean and, if torn, nicely patched. The brethren had to be washed, shaved, and have the hair brushed, because Br. Onisim would say that the meeting relates to the Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit, which is present. For that reason it was appropriate that cleanliness reign on all points. Thus, whoever would come from outside would be able to see that the spirit of a sound mind reigns there.

He was hunted by the priesthood. I remember that one time, in the Almas Valley, he was taken from the meeting, together with Br. Bote and other brothers and sisters. They were taken by the gendarmes from police station to police station, beaten and made to walk on foot.

After the Communists came, he was constantly under close surveillance. Though he worked very secretly, he was caught and arrested. He was already sick. They took him to the hospital, but it did not take long until he passed away. This was Br. Onisim, as I knew him.

*"But he was happy
that he could do
something for the
use of the brethren
and did not
complain; his face
always radiated
a joyful light."*

(Quoted from Page 74)



Petru Bote
(1903-1975)

SECOND MEMOIR

“THE OLD BROOD HEN”

PETRU BOTE — CLUJ NAPOCA

Br. Bote is in that category of people who leave an unforgettable, deep impression—“angel like” according to those who met him.

Together with his wife, Maria, he worked at the “Viata” Society as a colporteur. He worked closely with Bros. Sima, Filipoiu, Ciucas, and others. Though he did not travel as much as these, he was very hospitable. His house was always full of guests, and as the host, he would offer them excellent spiritual fellowship, as many of the brethren in their home have testified.

Br. Bote was an intelligent person with the ability to teach with subtle humor and irony. He was a mentor for the young people, and they testify about the zeal, courage, and uplift received while talking to him. He and his wife, Maria, a person of great poise—meek but also courageous—were front-line warriors in the vast field of the good fight of faith.

Br. Iosif Ilies from Mintiu writes about Br. Bote:

Br. Petru Bote was born in the village of Feldru, in the Somes Valley. He came from a reputable family of peasants, which had three boys and three girls.

Petru and Mihai Bote found the Truth while still young, and consecrated. At that time, there were no other Protestants in Feldru, and at their baptism, the entire village gathered as if for a

miracle, because no one had seen such a thing before. At that time, only the priests would baptize babies, and that was all. Therefore, the people from the youngest to the oldest came and said, “Two of Bote’s sons have lost their minds! They are now being baptized in Somes. Let’s go see!”

But later the villagers saw that the two youngsters were not crazy. In fact, by their faith, zeal, and talent of presenting the Truth, they gave such a good witness for the villagers, that 40 of the most notable people in the village came to accept the Truth.

Then Br. Petru went to Cluj to the Society, where he worked as a colporteur. There he met Sr. Maria, whom he married. [After they were married, however, Br. Bote went to prison for the Truth.]

I don’t have much information about the prison period. I found out that there were 40 prisoners in a cell, among whom were priests, even Episcopalians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventists, etc. In the evenings after returning from work, they organized a program where, by taking turns, everybody would present their faith.

When Br. Bote’s turn came, all could see it was something special. Therefore, they allowed him multiple evenings. Br. Petru proved with the Bible the entire Plan of God, from the Fall to the Restoration, especially showing how the Abrahamic promise would bless two families—one spiritual and one earthly.

All were amazed at his words. The one who led the program, seeing that all the arguments Br. Bote used were Biblical, decided to start from the beginning with everybody else so that all would have a chance to prove their beliefs with the Scriptures. But they failed the test, so that from then on when questions came up, they would say, “Mr. Bote is asked to answer this question!”, and all would listen attentively.

Br. Bote was an example for me, and I believe not only for me, but for all those who are faithful and have a pure heart. He proved his faithfulness to the end, with enthusiasm and zeal.

Here is the testimony of Br. Dionisie Moraru about the years spent with Br. Bote in prison.

For 15 years I had been a Jehovah’s Witness. Being a pioneer in this group, on May 10, 1957, I was captured and condemned to 25 years in prison.

First I was in prison at Jilava, a place full of bed bugs. When you would lie in bed you had the impression that you were floating, as so many bugs were moving underneath us.

I was then moved to Gherla. Here I met Br. Bote. But while there, I did not want to listen to him. This was because I started to see—from his discussions with the Witnesses, from his attitude (which I did not cease to secretly observe), from the way he presented the Truth—what a great difference there was between him and the Witnesses, and how they had departed from Br. Russell's teachings, which I knew.

I became troubled—there was a war inside me. I told him then, "Do not speak to me yet, because I am wounded."

Br. Bote was called by the cellmates, "the old brood hen." Do you know how an old brood hen is? It knows better than anybody else how to gather the chicks around her. So would Br. Bote gather the inmates around him. That was because he would speak beautifully, and all would gather to listen.

After a while we were moved to the Danube Delta. Here I began to listen to him. Every day they would take us to harvest the corn or to do other different agricultural activities. We would go to about the middle of the cornfield so the guards could not hear us from the edge, and Br. Bote would talk to me. Most of the subjects were from Volumes V and VI, about THE ATONEMENT BETWEEN MAN AND GOD and about THE NEW CREATION. Br. Bote had a very good memory. At that time he was about 58-59 years old, and I was 33-34. We lived like a father with his son for three and a half years, after which we were separated.

In the Delta, summer and winter, we lived in some huts made out of reeds and earth. At lunch we received a watery soup and potatoes or rice with horsemeat. This was not enough, but we would also eat the roots of different plants.

I remember how, on a hot summer day, the major-sergeant had to go to a meeting and left us under the supervision of some civilian army soldiers, young people who were fulfilling their army term. Then one of the prisoners asked permission to take a bath in the Delta. We were all permitted to do that, and that gave me a good opportunity to be baptized. Br. Bote had the baptismal service. That was a beautiful day.

A short time after that, Br. Bote had a stroke and became paralyzed on the right side. He was sent to the hospital. He was freed in 1964. Being left alone, I began to speak the Truth to those willing to listen. During the years spent with Br. Bote I learned much from him and I received great encouragement seeing his way of life.

Later, I met other brothers there in the Danube Delta: Br. Sandu Mogojan, Br. Danila, and Br. Cabau from Bihor.

After seven and a half years, I was freed, but two more years passed before I was able to sleep at night without having nightmares about the prison experiences.

The following testimony of Sr. Margareta Moraru is about Br. Bote’s personality, way of life and strong faith:

I knew him since I was a child. He owned a newspaper stand in the train station in Cluj. The news delivery was an activity that offered many opportunities for spreading the Truth. As I knew him, he was good, generous, calm, and jovial. He liked to read—not to speak extemporaneously—and then he would explain beautifully what he read. He accumulated much knowledge, and he had an unusual gift for passing it on.

Br. Bote’s wife, Maria, was faithful, meek, and always ready to help others. While the brother was in prison, Sr. Maria took his place at the train station in Cluj, working and witnessing until she retired.

They had a great trial when their son of 18 years old died after receiving a shot of the wrong medicine, but they endured even this trial in a very Christian way.

Sr. Viorica Rosca testifies about Br. Bote, as one of her much admired brothers:

Br. Petru would look at you always with a smile, and I’ve never seen him with a gloomy or sad countenance. Through the solemnity with which he would present the Truth, he generated great respect for God, for the Lord Jesus, and for the brethren.

In the meetings, he usually would have a study. In the beginning, he used to tell us to unplug our “plugs” that would connect us to the [distracting] things we left at home. He would keep a lively atmosphere, provoking every brother and sister to participate in the

study. At the end, he would recount what were the lessons for that day, and he would urge the brethren to tell what they remembered. If somebody didn't remember anything, Br. Petru would use a joke to suggest that you could waste your time even in the meeting.

He liked to help the brethren, to get involved in their hardships, to give them advice. He was very hospitable and, even though he had very educated people in his house and family, he wasn't ashamed to receive his simple and uneducated brethren.

After he came back from prison, even though he was hemiplegic (paralyzed on the right side), he continued to serve the brethren. He would even walk three kilometers (2 miles) to the place where the meeting was. Even though he would walk with difficulty, he never said he was tired. Moreover, he didn't even talk about the difficulty of his time in detention.

I was by him when he closed his eyes to pass beyond the Veil. I'm glad that I had this honor.

His wife, Maria, was a sister serious in words and deeds. She liked to tell about how she got the Truth, the years spent at the Society, and about her desire to serve the Lord and His cause as much as possible. She was a very courageous woman. When her son died, she told me that she received the news, “Your son is severely ill,” to which she requested that the Truth be told to her, even if Emanuel was dead. Finding out that it was so, she answered, “I have nothing left but the hope of the resurrection of the dead.”



Sandu Mogojan
(1920-2006)

THIRD MEMOIR

“BECAUSE I WHISTLED IN THE CHURCH”

SANDU MOGOJAN — MANASTIRENI

Br. Sandu from Manastireni was an old defender of the Truth. A jovial figure, agile and full of life, with a rich linguistic style, intelligent and spiritual, and with a good sense of humor, Br. Sandu won the approval of all those with whom he came in contact. His vast knowledge, combined with a rich life experience, kept the attention of his listeners alive. He could talk about almost any subject—but he preferred to talk about the Truth.

In order to understand the quick and bold temperament of Br. Sandu—which made him a perpetual defender of the principles of righteousness and honesty—we will relate a story he told.

It was during World War II when Br. Sandu’s house was invaded by German officers. One of them got up on the bed with his muddy army boots and started to step on the pillows. (The village custom is to lay pillows with beautiful handiwork on the bed.) This was an extra wickedness on the side of the German officer, which Br. Sandu could not endure. Turning his cheek in a sign of impudence, he said, “Nicht Kultur!” For this he could have paid with his life, if the German army had not been in such a hurry to leave.

The interview that follows was taken in the summer of 2000 in Cluj when Br. Sandu was 80 years old. (We tried to maintain his savory style as much as possible.)

— Br. Sandu, tell us something about your family!

— *My father was Reformed and my mother was Orthodox. I used to go to the Reformed Church when I was little. But at school, where the Reformed priest would come to teach the religion class, I noticed that he would favor the kids from wealthy families. Then I went to my dad and told him, “A God that favors only the rich kids, I do not want!” That’s when I stopped going to the Reformed Church. So I decided to go to the Orthodox Church with Mom. It was before Easter, and I was about 17 years old. The people used to go to confession then, so I went also. The questions the priest asked me there were so impudent that it made me become disgusted with the Orthodox system as well. I have never stepped in an Orthodox Church since then.*

— How did you come to know the Truth after these experiences with the Reformed and Orthodox Churches?

— *I liked a girl, Maria, whom I also married. Her father was the elder of the Bible Student class in that village. In the beginning, I wasn’t interested, until one day when I decided to go to see how things were there. And as I stepped into the meeting place, I was impressed with everything I saw. The brothers would decide among them who would speak when, then they would read out of Volumes, they gave explanations and asked questions. I liked the fact that people were able to ask what they did not understand—unlike in the churches. To me, the brethren looked like angels. I have never left the meetings since then.*

— What were the circumstances of your arrest?

— *I was coming home from work one day, and when I got off the train, Captain Isaac of the Security [see p. 87] met me and said, “Are you the son of Alexandru and Ileana?” “I am,” I told them. “Come with us then!” They took me to their car where two other Security people were waiting. Then I told them, “First take me home, because I received my paycheck, and I need to give it to my wife!” They took me home, but they also searched the house. They gathered a sack of books. The Captain asked me, “What are you? A Priest? Why do you have so many books?” “No, I’m a painter. But from these books we learn the laws of God.”*

— Who else was arrested at the same time?

— *Br. Gheorghe Colosvari, Br. Bote, Br. Danila, Br. Pop from Starci. At the investigation they told me, “We didn’t find anything bad against you!” “What could you find, when I was the president of the trade-union, and I taught the people to be honest and righteous?” “Anyway, because you are part of an organization that is not recognized by our law, you get five years!” “May you live!” I told them. At the end of the inquiry, they asked me if I would continue to speak the Truth if they would let me free. “Yes! I can’t be any other way.”*

— Where were you in prison?

— *I was six months in Gherla and three years in Periprava. When they took us to the cell, it was a Sunday morning. I told the senior-lieutenant, “Mister Lieutenant, don’t keep me in the cell, because I’m a handyman, and I can do services for you.” I was in Gherla at that time. Three weeks they kept me there. There were priests and people of other faiths, and we spoke from the Word. Then they took me out, and I worked in painting. I worked well, with all my heart, and on this basis, I received a letter of recommendation when I was freed from prison, “Reckoned rehabilitated and having a correct behavior.” While still there they took me to work in construction, where I was unsupervised most of the time. The wife of the Security Officer [see p. 87] saw that I was honest and talked differently than others did. She asked me, “Mr. Sandu, what did you do to get here?” “What did I do?” I told her, “I whistled in the church!” She and her neighbors laughed at this. But from then on, I had the occasion to speak about the Truth to her and her neighboring ladies for hours at a time.*

— Didn’t you have negative thoughts while in prison? Didn’t you get discouraged?

— *No! I was open for any danger—even to be silenced—because I was convinced of what I believed. And now I am even ten times more convinced!*

— How was the food?

— *In Gherla the food was pretty good, but one time I broke my tooth in it because they had put little stones in the bean dish.*

— How did you find your wife, Maria, when you returned?

— *She got diabetes while I was gone, and this sickness makes you oscillate between two extremes, either very joyous, or like a stone. When I got home and she saw me, she seemed to turn into a piece of wood. She didn't expect me! The Security Officer who took me home started to warn her and her father not to let me go to the same place where I was when they took me to prison.*

— Did you have other problems with the Security after that?

— *Soon after that one of our brothers, who was the father-in-law of the Security Chief, died. I asked Br. Ciucas: “Would you like to come to help us bury the Security Chief's father-in-law?” And he answered, “Even with the risk of being put in jail, I will come.” So we buried him together with Br. Ciucas. Soon after that, they found out we had a meeting and came there. They took me and told me, “Tell your wife to prepare the meal because you'll be back in an hour!” “Let not that hour be another four years!” I answered them. When they took me they left me outside for awhile, which I spent praying. Then they took me in. I began to tell them the plan of God from the Creation to the Restoration. They were listening so attentively that the clerk who was supposed to take the report forgot to take notes. At the end they told me to come back on Monday to pay a fine of 8,000 lei, [money] from the brethren. This was a lot, and they asked me at the bank, “But what did you do?” And again I told her, “I whistled in the Church!” (At that time, with the 8,000 lei you could buy 12 cows.)*

The Security Officers asked me to be their spy. But I told them, “I would rather have you raise a gibbet right here and hang me by my tongue than do with my tongue what you are asking me.” After that they left us alone.

— What is your message for the younger generation?

— *After I found the Truth, I never doubted it again. I never asked myself, “I wonder if this is really the Truth?” You, too, should try to convince yourself of the Truth in your heart. Prepare yourself for the Day of Jehovah's vengeance, because through it is the entrance into the beautiful Kingdom we are all waiting for!*

Definitions

Security: Secret Police Force of Romania—officially founded, under close guidance from Soviet KGB officers, on August 30, 1948. However, it had effectively existed since 1944, when Communists began to infiltrate the Ministry of Internal Affairs on a large scale. By 1951, the Securitate, at the instigation of the Party, began to systematically exterminate opponents of the regime. Special prisons were established for “class enemies” to be sent to, usually without warrant, trial or inquiry. In these camps, prisoners were either worked to death or simply shot.

Security Officer: A paid officer of the Securitate.

*“Prepare yourself
for the Day of
Jehovah’s vengeance,
because through
it is the entrance
into the beautiful
Kingdom we are
all waiting for!”*

(Quoted from Page 86)



Iancu Petrita
(1927-2000)

FOURTH MEMOIR

“HE WAS DEFENDING WITH POWER OUR BEAUTIFUL TEACHINGS”

IANCU PETRITA — BIHOR

Srs. Veta Balanean and Marioara Cimpian from Zalau will tell us about Br. Iancu from Bihor. He lived the last years of his life in Zalau and died suddenly in the spring of 2000. These sisters knew him well, and they agreed to write briefly the experiences of Br. Iancu.

What we remember about Br. Iancu is that he was of medium height and plump. He was a strong character, able to speak the Truth for hours. Here is the report we received:

On December 13, 1958, in the morning at about 5 - 6 o'clock, Br. Iancu was taken from home, being given permission to take some food and warm clothes with him. From the moment the Security Officers came in the house, he was not allowed out of their sight.

He was taken by van to the Security in Oradea. There, he was kept in a cell for four months, with poor food, and was not allowed to sit down or to lean against anything until 10 p.m. Every day he was interrogated and asked where the meetings were taking place. They also asked him regarding the “present evil” day from the First Volume, in the hope that he would say that Communism was bad. But he would explain beautifully that this was referring to all the evil in the world: sickness, sorrow, and death. He would tell them about the Kingdom, the blessings it will bring, and about the way the order of

things on the earth will change. Then they would ask him, “What will happen to us?” “You, also, will need to submit to the new order in the Kingdom,” he would reply.

His case was closed, and he was declared opposed to the social order of the time. After four months of imprisonment and many investigations, he received the sentence: 15 years in prison, without any right to parcels or letters, and all his goods were confiscated. (His family had to pay rent in their own home).

From here, he was taken to Balta Braila. On the way there, they chained his feet so that he could not walk, but only jump. Br. Mitrea from Cabesti would help him when passing over the railroad tracks to get to their train wagon. Those who watched over him, mocked him saying, “Did you have horses at home?” “I did.” “You should jump then like your horses.” They got there at night and had to cross a bridge over a river. There they cut off his chains and threw them in the water.

He worked there, building the dam for the Danube River. When he came back from work, he was wet and had to wait that way for the roll call of 500 people. They would sleep in a shed with only a roof, and the “walls” were made out of guards that watched them. These guards would tell them that they were brought there for extermination. He was in Balta Braila for about three years.

After two and a half years he got sick with typhoid fever and was hospitalized for a long time. There were many sick inmates, and they had jailors watching over them. After he slightly recovered, although still unable to work, he was sent to Gherla.

The conditions in Gherla were better. There were many in one room: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, Baptists, lawyers, priests, and others. But not many were there for their faith.

However, he had many discussions with the Witnesses, and he defended with power our beautiful teachings. Every day they had a program that every one taking turns would say what he wanted to say. When it came Br. Iancu’s turn, his inmates would say, “Today Mr. Petruta will speak to us!” Br. Iancu would speak to them grandly and marvelously about the Plan of God from creation to restoration. People who had a high standing in the world would come and listen to him and tell him, “You shouldn’t be here!” and they would tell him that they wished they had been imprisoned for the same reason!

One day he was called to the office, and they asked him, “How many years were you condemned for and how many years have you fulfilled?” He told them that he was condemned for fifteen years and that he had more than three years fulfilled. They told him that ten years were pardoned and he only had five to fulfill.

So after a year and a month, he was freed. He was released in Oradea where he had been taken from, and there they asked him, “Do you still believe in this sect?” He answered, “I never believed in a sect, but in the resurrection of the dead!” Then they said, “Look at him! He is still not re-educated!” They asked him then for a service, which was to report to them about everything taking place in the village, who does what and who goes where. But he refused to do this service. However, for one year he had to report to them every month.

Reflecting on these experiences, Br. Iancu spoke with pleasure and not with bitterness. For the rest of his life, as much as we know, he maintained a great desire to tell the Truth, and he never got tired of visiting the brethren.



Lazar and Anuta Fodor
(1920-2003) - (Born 1923)

FIFTH MEMOIR

“THE PRESENT SUFFERINGS
ARE NOT FOREVER”

LAZAR FODOR — SURDUC

For many years Br. Lazar had the reputation of being one of the best orators. Truly, he had an exceptional memory, distinguished vocabulary, sharp intelligence, solid knowledge of the Bible and the Volumes, and the courage to stand the tests. All these qualities—and more—make him a very special character who won the love of the brethren and the admiration of the people.

Answering one of our letters, Br. Lazar sent us the following information and history, which we structured into sections to make it easier to follow.

*Dear brethren and sisters in the Lord,
I, the writer of this letter, am called Lazar Fodor, born in 1920,
February 29, in the village of Surduc, county of Bihor, Romania.*

The School Years

My father, even though a wealthy man, favored the Protestants, though at that time, the only Protestants in my village were the Pentecostals. This was before the Communist regime.

I had a grandmother who could not read. She loved me very much, and she would ask me to read to her from the Bible. I listened to what I was reading to her. On the one hand, it made me realize that I had

many things to correct in my behavior. On the other hand, I liked it and it made me happy. I was still a child in school, but I became the defender of the child Jesus and the opposer of those who were persecuting him.

My parents wanted to send me to higher education. My father wanted to make me a priest; my mother wanted me to be an army officer. But I kept quiet and said in my heart, “Neither one, nor the other.”

I went to secondary school in Oradea. I was there for two years, and I was one of the top students. In the third year, I went to the Emanoil Gojdu High School. In the fourth year, I told my parents that I was not going back to school. They gave me a good spanking and took me there. But I pretended that I was sick, very sick. They took me to a doctor, and he asked them, “How many children do you have?” “Only this one,” said my father. Then the doctor began to convince them to take me home because a friend of his, who also had only one son, sent him to schools until it destroyed him. This convinced my father to take me home.

Being the only child and not having other siblings to play with, I started reading all kinds of books, among which were some biblical ones.

My parents, in their own way, were people with expectations—especially towards me, even though I gave up the schooling they wished for me to have. One time my father told me with grief, “I meant to send you to schools in France, at Paris, for a higher education, but you opposed even the schools in this country.” “Thank you very much, Father, because you had a good goal, in your own way. But from the books I have read so far, I found that no other book has a content as rich in divine teachings regarding the past, present and future as the books of the Bible Students. For this reason, I have chosen not to go to France.”

It is true, though, that from the age of 15 up to 20, I was a “party boy,” a young man of earthly amusements. The full impact of the Truth was hidden from me until 1940.

In 1940 I had a painful experience regarding my grandmother, with whom I had shared my secrets since I was a small child. She fell down and died suddenly. Because my father was very wealthy and I was the only child, my relatives desired my death so that they could

inherit the wealth. My grandmother had protected me from all these rivalries—one more reason to grieve for her.

Contact with the Truth

My first contact with the Bible Students was in that same year, 1940. The first book I put my hands on was THE HARP. After I read it, I went to the Pentecostal meeting and asked one of the preachers if he had ever heard of Protestants who do not believe in hell. He said, “There is one right here, in Dragesti. He is a learned man, with much knowledge, but he doesn’t even believe in the Trinity!”

Then I went and looked for him and his house. That was in 1941. The brother was Br. Gheorghe Ambru, and he told me that we had brethren in the area around Beius: in Cabesti, Meziead, and Josani. I told him about my grandfather’s sister, the mother of Sr. Irina from Astileu, who had the Truth since World War I. I asked him if he had books. He told me that he did, but they were hidden because the meetings were prohibited and the houses were being searched for books.

And suddenly, as if it fell from heaven, in front of me I spotted a chest in the room. Inside it were Volumes I, V, VI, VII. He lent them to me.

So I made a schedule to read five pages daily from the Bible and ten from the Volumes.

The Persecutions Begin

In 1940-1941 about ten brethren came out of the Pentecostal movement, and we started having meetings and visiting other classes. For example, to get to the meetings in Cabesti, we would go 15 km (10 miles) by foot through forests and ravines to take the train from Dragesti to Beius about 40 km (25 miles), and from Beius to Cabesti, we would walk another 13 km (8 miles).

But the governments were constantly against us. Even during Antonescu’s dictatorship, the village priest showed up at our meeting. He made a report and said that he would give it to the gendarmes and they would send us to the Martial Court in Timisoara. But at that time we were only fined.

In 1942 we had a son whom we did not baptize because I knew that the decision to be baptized was for mature people who understood what they are doing. Because of that decision, once again the priest gave us into the hand of the gendarmes to open a case against me.

One evening, in 1948, I saw a man coming into my house. He said, “The Peace of the Lord to you!” I answered, “The Peace of the Lord to you!” It just happened that I had a Volume in my hand. I laid it on the bed and put my hat on top of it. Then he asked me what books I had, and he saw the Manna and the Bible. He said, “I am empowered to deal with cults. Therefore, you will come with me to the People’s Council.” There the Council asked me:

- Are there Bible meetings in your house?
- *Whoever comes, I tell them what I believe about God.*

- What sect are you part of?
- *None, I am a free thinker.*

He then made a report and informed me that I was forbidden to have meetings of a biblical nature without authorization.

Now I want to talk a little bit about my family situation.

It was in 1941 and World War II had already started. I had to enroll in the army. My parents did not want to be left alone and thought of marrying me to the daughter of some distant relatives, who were also believers. All this was done quietly, so I would escape the army.

I decided to separate my household from my father’s, in order to avoid some obstacles in my consecration vow to the service of the Lord. My father opposed this decision. I was always thinking: “Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be given unto you.” So I placed marriage in second place, and wealth in third.

Together with my wife, I built our entire house—with the Lord’s help and with our hands—and our son was left with my parents.

Starting in 1945, after the end of the War, I made contacts with the brethren all over the country (because before that I didn’t know if

there were brethren in other areas). I asked myself: Is it possible there are no brethren in other areas? I wondered because I had complete joy when I read THE STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, and I understood the ransom price for all mankind and the restoration of all things. All this understanding was clear and precious to me. I understood that the Volumes together with the Bible are the greatest riches.

The Arrest

The date of my arrest was December 13, 1958.

During the night I heard a noise in the courtyard. Somebody shouted loudly, “Open the door!” I saw that there were more people. They asked me if there were strangers in the house and if I was armed, and then they asked me about books. I told them that I had books of a biblical character. Then they said, “You are arrested! Turn your face to the wall and put your hands behind you!”

Then they started the search; they turned everything in the house upside down. I had a notebook which I had used to take notes from all I had read during the last eighteen years, from 1940 to 1958: the Bible, THE STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, THE PHOTODRAMA OF CREATION and the TABERNACLE SHADOWS—a total of 95,000 pages. I was reading fifteen pages a day: five from the Bible and ten from the Volumes.

When I saw the notebook in their hands, I trembled realizing that now they could find out everything about me. But, slowly I regained my calm.

During this time, other Security Officers went to my father’s house and to my neighbor, Br. Vese, and to Br. Iancu Petrita.

I heard the dogs barking through the night, giving the warning that the wolves had burst into the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd.

About 8-9 o’clock, they took us with our hands behind our backs, under escort, to the front of the House of Culture of the village and there was a van—like a whale—waiting for us.

The prisoners were four, and the Security Officers were about twenty, all armed. They put us in the van, and we left Surduc to go to the building of the Security in Oradea. When we got to a forest, they asked us to sing a hymn, and we sang “Praise the Lord” (Hymn 55) and “Great Art Thou, Lord, Great is Thy Power.”

On the way to Oradea I was thinking of my sick wife and my four children left at home. I didn't know when I would see them again.

When we arrived, they asked us to get out of the car, even though we were blindfolded. As soon as I stepped into the air, four guards grabbed me and took me into the waiting room and threw me down headlong.

The officer on duty told me to take my clothes off quickly. And because I couldn't do it fast, he hit me with a rubber object on my left side, face, neck, and eyes, so I couldn't see anything and one of my teeth broke. I fell down, and he wanted to step on me, but the Security Officer who was at my home intervened. He asked me to sign a declaration even though I couldn't see anything. He took my hand and signed it. They gave me striped clothes to put on and took me to a cell with two concrete beds.

Here, I had to respect the cell program, which was as follows: from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. I was allowed to sit down but I was not allowed to lean against anything, nor on my elbows, and from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. I was allowed to lie down.

The food was as follows: 100 g [3.5 oz.] of bread and a piece of cornmeal, which I would eat all at once. During the day they gave us a cup of coffee (which never tasted sweet). At lunch and in the evening they would give us a kettle of bean or potato soup.

When you heard the key at the door, you had to go to the end of the cell with your face to the wall and your hands behind you. The guard came in and said, “Pssst!” Then you had to turn your head, he would put tin glasses (opaque) on your eyes and this way they took us to the bathroom or to interrogations.

The Interrogations

The interrogations took place at night. All the Security Officers were dressed with army clothes during the inquiries.

One time I came in front of the senior-lieutenant, who asked me to give him a declaration. He told me, “You should know that God has abandoned you!” I looked at him in amazement. He continued, “He gave you into the hands of the Devil. I am the Devil.” I thought then in my heart, but I didn't say it, “You are not the Devil, but one of his servants you certainly are.” But my face was not sad, but calm. Then

he told me, “If you would only have the same face when you get out of here...! That is...if you ever get out...”

This was the way the interrogations started in my case, and they lasted for almost a year until I left the Oradea Penitentiary.

The senior-lieutenant who was questioning me asked me how I arrived at these beliefs. I told him how at the age of 20 I had an accident and my nervous system was left shaken, and I couldn't calm it any other way than by reading the Bible and the Volumes.

He told me that when they searched the house they found the Bible, the STUDIES and a notebook. “You wrote here that you read the STUDIES every year. You have three hours tonight to tell me about what you read during your eighteen years of studies.”

I started to talk about all that God had planned to accomplish for the welfare of mankind, beginning with creation, the fall, the promises, fleshly Israel, the shadows and types, the ransom price, the calling and choosing of a “little flock” to the second presence of our Lord, the restoration of Israel, and the restoration of all mankind during the Millennium—which had already started!

At the end I asked him what was evil in what I said. And he answered, “If all these things will come to fulfillment, I give my solemn word (and he put his hand on his heart) that I will be among the first to subordinate during those glorious times you talked about.”

I asked him if I would be condemned. He told me that I would be, because we were not authorized by the Communist Party. Then I asked him if he personally would add to my difficulties, and he said no, he was only doing his duty.

The chief of the investigations came in at that time and asked him, “So, how is it with Lazar?” “He convinced me of everything; all I need now is the baptism!” the lieutenant answered.

The chief, finding out that I had a headache, came to me and hitting me slightly over the head with my notebook said, “I'm surprised your head didn't break from the 95,000 pages you have read. None of my teachers has read that much.”

The Process

Finally, after four months of bitter treatment, cold, fatigue, and hunger, we were taken to the Oradea Courthouse to be judged by the

Military Tribunal from Timisoara, which came to Oradea especially for this occasion.

The twelve brothers and one sister (because at the same time they arrested us in Surduc, they had also arrested other brethren from the county of Bihor) were taken to the middle of the assembly, where the President of the Court and the Prosecutor who was accusing the brethren were. The families of all the brethren were present there also.

The Prosecutor asked me the question, "What do you understand through the 'Present Evil World' and 'The Golden Age'?" I answered, "Mister President and most honored dignitaries, because I am being questioned today regarding my faith, I want to answer what I understand about the 'Present Evil World' and the 'Golden Age' that will follow. This expression was written in the Bible 2,000 years ago, and, thus, was in no way referring to the Popular Republic of Romania, but it is about man's fall into sin and death and how these traversed on all people because they all sinned. But this 'Evil World' from Galatians 1:4, based on selfishness and unrighteousness, will be eliminated because of the ransom. Then the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord and all the corrupt earthly systems will be removed. This will be the true 'Golden Age' that will be for all the people that ever lived."

All the brethren were questioned at their turn, and the sentence followed. I received twenty years of hard labor or ten years of hard imprisonment. The others received between ten and sixteen years of hard labor, plus the confiscation of their possessions.

Upon each of us hearing our sentence, we were first shocked, because we did not expect such a hard sentence, but then we felt encouraged.

Two of these brothers died in the Gherla Prison: Teodor Lazar from Rosia and Stefan Listes from Oradea.

The Gherla Prison

One night, at the beginning of December 1959 (after almost a year of imprisonment), the transfer was made from the Oradea Prison to the one in Gherla. A great number of prisoners were transferred at that time, and those of us who were sentenced to many years had

chains on our feet. Everything took place very strictly and the smallest mistake could cost you your life.

Those with a sentence of 15 years and up were considered fierce enemies of the Regime and received very harsh treatment. This was because a revolt took place in the prison in Gherla just before our arrival, and they had to place the entire city on alert. A great oppression of the prisoners began, and the treatment we received was incredibly harsh. We were taken for a walk for 10 minutes every day, but in the winter we had to run down the frozen stairs with our shoes in our hands. When we got down we would put our shoes on and then walk for 10 minutes. Then we had to take our shoes off again and run up the stairs to our cell. So I started hating even the opportunity to walk.

I was a cellmate of General Pascu. He was 70 years old and I was 41. So I would help him during the walk by holding his arm. I told him about the Truth and the Golden Age that will eliminate all pain. He appreciated the Truth a lot. He was crying for his daughter, left at home, whom he never got to see again because he died in that prison, in Gherla.

The Aiud Prison

In 1961 I was moved to the Aiud Prison, one of the harshest Communist prisons. The country's "cream of the crop" were imprisoned here. (By this, I mean only educated men, professors, engineers, lawyers.)

But I had many opportunities to share the Truth. From the beginning, I noticed that every morning they organized an Orthodox biblical service. In the same cell with me, among others, were a priest, an engineer, and a professor.

They noticed that I was sitting separately, and they asked me what sect I belonged to. I told them that I was a free thinker and spoke only from the Holy Scriptures in harmony with the four attributes of God.

I remember a school principal from Fagaras, accused of being a member of the Resistance movement from the Fagaras Mountains (the ones captured there, in the mountains, were condemned to death, which sentence was later changed to hard labor for life). This principal asked me about the soul, because the priest was saying that

God puts the soul in the mother’s womb. I had the chance to explain how man was created and how he “became a living soul.” The principal then said, “This must be the truth. That man became a living soul, that there was a time when he was not, and that when he dies he is no longer.”

Because of the bad food and the small quantity of it, in 1962 I became sick with stomach problems and was hospitalized and operated on in the prison’s hospital. After the treatment was over, I returned to the cell, but I became so weak that I could get up only with great difficulty, holding onto the bed or the walls. During the walk someone had to hold my arm; otherwise, I couldn’t stand on my feet.

When I was nearing the end of my fourth year in the Aiud Prison—because it was known that I was imprisoned for my faith—a lawyer from Bucharest asked me why I left the faith of my ancestors. Then I had the chance to speak about the true ancestral faith, the one from the beginning.

He was impressed and proposed that every morning we should have some time for the clarification of the Bible, where everybody could take turns by sharing his understanding of it. During my turn I spoke about the symbols of the Bible: the woman veiled in the sun and with the moon at her feet, the dragon that pulls after him the third part of the stars. I talked about the parables and other symbolic pictures.

As long as I was with the lawyer, he was always challenging me and asking me questions. He even asked me about the Lord’s coming, but I told him that we would clarify that gradually.

One morning, the guard opened the door and called the name of the lawyer and said: “Pack your things because you are being let go!” But he turned to me and said, “Lazar, I’m not going out of here until you finish what you have to say!” Then the guard asked, “What does he have to say?” “He talks about the resurrection of the dead,” the lawyer answered. So he stayed and listened until I finished what I had to say.

But not everybody in the cell was a sympathizer with the Word. There were eight people and four beds in our cell. As I said earlier, all of us were political prisoners, and all of them were educated people. I remember one time when I entered the cell and some were sitting on the upper beds. I heard one of them say, “Gentlemen, I am speaking about Lazar Fodor, who continually speaks religious propaganda,

and I will present this to the commander.” The one who spoke was a great legionnaire.⁽¹⁾ So I answered him, “Gentlemen, it is true that I was imprisoned because I organized meetings of a biblical nature, but at least I didn’t do iron-guard politics. And if anybody wanted to know why I was condemned, I did nothing but tell him the truth.”

Another time, a priest hit me on the face because he didn’t like what I was saying. Also, we had permanent spies in the cell, which informed the Communists of everything going on among the prisoners.

Galati

One night in December 1962, all the prisoners were packed like sardines—about 150 in each 70-seat bus—with the destination of Galati. That year the Danube River had caused great flooding, and the dams had to be elevated. From Galati they took us up on the Danube River about 100 km (60 miles), on a ferryboat tied to a ship. It was raining and snowing, and we were all wet. When we got off the ferry, we had to march in columns of five through mud up to our knees to the so-called “dorms.” There they gave us striped clothes, and the second day we started work.

We were given a daily work quota to raise the wall of the dam by 3 cubic meters (9 cubic feet) per person. We were told that those who accomplished their quota would have the right to send a postcard home and ask for a 5 kg. (11 lb.) package.

This period also passed, and one day I was freed and was able to go home.

Thanks be unto God that the present sufferings are not forever; that the trials we are subject to now are not everlasting—but everlasting is the life hidden in Him.

(1) *Legionnaire*: A member of the Legionary Movement—an ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic, fascist movement, and political party in Romania in the period from 1927 into the early part of WWII. It is also known as the Iron Guard or Legion of the Archangel Michael.



Lazar and Anuta Fodor
(1920-2003) - (Born 1923)

SIXTH MEMOIR

HOW WERE THE LIFE AND TRIALS OF THE BELIEVERS IN THE COMMUNIST ERA?

ANUTA FODOR — SURDUC

Sr. Anuta has the talent of a writer. For a woman without much formal education, we found that admirable. In the following testimony of her life, she herself chose the title of the report, divided it by sections, and chose a subtitle for each. The storyline unrolls logically and memorably. With her gift of storytelling, Sr. Anuta recreated places and events so that they became alive, as if in a movie.

How I Came to Know the Truth

My mother was a believer and loved the Truth, and I started to read the Bible while in school.

When I was 16, I read Volume VI, even though I didn't understand it yet. I remember that at that time, an Adventist asked me to marry him and talked to me about his books and about eternal torture. I told him, "Well, I know that Volume VI doesn't support that!" (At that time, I thought that all Christians had Volume VI.)

At 17 years of age, Lazar, now my husband, asked me to marry him. He was in Romania, and I was in Hungary. I was glad when I found out that his entire family believed in the Truth.

I received the Volumes from my aunt, Sr. Irina from Astileu. She gave them to me with the desire that I would be duty bound to read them all.

That was during the war, and my husband left with the army. It was very difficult to have light in the house because petroleum was scarce during the war. I had a great desire to read, but there was no light, so I had to find a solution.

During the day I wasn't able to read because I had things to do, but at night I would light the fire in the stove, and I remember reading all of Volume V by that light. And I never forgot Chapter 9, with the two questions every believer has to ask himself.⁽¹⁾ I asked myself those questions and the answer was, “Yes!” This gave me an unspeakable joy. I read all the Volumes. Even though it was very tiring, I didn't give up. So I read them all again, over and over again—even in the field at lunchtime.

After the war, my husband, Br. Lazar, came home.

We had brethren coming out of the Pentecostals, among whom was Sr. Eva, a sister with capacity and zeal. We rejoiced together, sharing with all of them the precious Volumes, and so the brethren grew in their knowledge of the Truth, slowly but very firmly. We each took turns hosting the meetings at our houses.

The Circumstances and Persecutions under Capitalism

We were turned into the Sheriff by the village priest. He called my husband, Lazar, into his office because he didn't baptize our child. This summons took place in the year 1942. My husband told the sheriff that the priest must bring proof from the Bible that the child must be baptized and he did not give in, even though he was threatened and retained at the police station.

During the course of this time, the Lord raised three more brothers for us, who are still keeping their faith unspotted from the world and its teachings.

(1) “Was I ever drawn to Christ?—to recognize him as my Redeemer, through whose righteousness alone I could have access to the heavenly Father, and be acceptable with him? . . . Did I ever fully consecrate myself—my life, my time, my talents, my influence, my all—to God?” (Volume V, p. 229.)

The Beginning of the Communist Era and Its Persecutions

During the rise of Communism, we did not stop and did not hesitate for a moment, but continued preaching the Truth in secret. But gradually the Communist Security put us under surveillance. They hired detectives to spy on us every day. But there were also good people who were telling us that the Security wanted to catch us having a meeting.

For awhile we changed our customs and had our meetings in the fields. We would meet there and study together.

When we were warned that they were planning to catch us during the Lord's Memorial, we held the meeting in the fields anyway during the night. With the oil lamp in our hand, we were hidden in a valley far away from the village.

The persecutions continued like a chain. They came to search our houses. When they confiscated our books for the first time, we were able to regain them this way: The spy and the Security Officers left the sack of books with the store clerk while they went to drink some whiskey. Somebody informed us of that, and so we went to the store with other books. With the clerk's approval, we were able to replace the confiscated books in the sack with the other books. After that we were more cautious, and we hid them well.

The Persecutions Intensify

A little after that experience, an official empowered by religious organizations came and called my husband Lazar to go to the town hall and sign a declaration that he would not be active in his religion. But he responded that he could not sign that declaration.

Then they came up with a plan to kidnap him. Here is how it worked. They had first arrested a young brother from Oradea by calling him on the phone and asking him to go to Episcopia Bihorului, to a certain address, telling him that they needed him to fix the roof of the house. That was the bait. The young brother went there. That was an area right near the border with Hungary. Big surprise! It turned out that the house was the address of a Security Officer! When the brother entered the house, they told him, "You are arrested because you wanted to cross the border to spread propaganda on the other side." The brother was shocked by their plan.

They took him by car to the Security Office in Oradea where they asked him about the brethren from Surduc—especially about my husband, Lazar Fodor. They suggested hiring him as a spy and having him report to them three times a week. They also told him that he would get free tickets to travel anywhere he chose. They also told him that he had one day to decide. They said that even though they knew almost everything, they wanted to find out more. "We know where Fodor is hiding his books; he took them to his neighbor across the street," they said.

Being a wise brother—immediately after he was released—he informed us about the books. We took the books home from our neighbor right away, without thinking they would come very soon.

The next morning, the young brother went and told Security that he could not be their informer. This happened in December 10, 1958.

The Arrest of My Husband and Three Other Brothers from Surduc

Three days later on December 13, 1958, at 5:00 in the morning, somebody knocked adamantly at the door. The Security had keys and usually entered unexpectedly, but our lock was broken so they were forced to wait.

We didn't even imagine that they would come so soon, and, therefore, the books were sitting in one of the rooms—not hidden. The night before we had a meeting at some brethren's house. The content of the meeting was especially providentially designed. That evening we received great encouragement as we talked about the persecutions of the saints and the example of Nehemiah and Ezra, who worked on the temple with one hand while holding their weapons with the other.

And early in the morning we were tested to see what we would do. When we heard the knock on the door, my husband got up quickly (without turning on the lamp as we had no electricity at that time) and five Security Officers came in dressed like civilians.

They had flashlights and told us to get dressed quickly. After my husband got dressed, they told him, "You are arrested! Arms up!" To me, they said, "Get dressed because we have to search the house!"

The House Search

When they came in, I thought immediately of how I could save the books. In our smallest room there was a bed where two of our daughters were sleeping, one 13 years old, and the other one 9. The books were in a chest under their bed. The Security Officers insisted that I should get dressed, but I told them that I couldn't get dressed with them in there because my fear of them was so great, and I couldn't find my clothes. They asked me if I had another lamp, and I lit an old one that we used for the barn.

While the boss was busy writing something, I told them, "Be good and let me go in the small room to get dressed." This is what I did. I took the keys for the book chest from the room they were in, together with some thread and went in the small room to get dressed. I went under the bed, opened the chest and took the books. I put the Volumes under my clothes. The Volume IV was too big and I threw it in bed with my daughters, together with the magazines, and they threw them out the window, behind the house, where we were storing wood. We did not know that the house was surrounded by the village policemen, but they did not say anything to the Security Officers inside, and so we didn't get in trouble for that. Because I was taking long, the Security Officers called, "You are not ready yet?" I told them that I was so scared that I couldn't dress fast.

Finally, I finished getting dressed with the books underneath my clothes, I put a thick house robe on top and I came out slowly—for fear that the books would fall out! I asked them to come out with me to the outhouse. I didn't really need to go but I had to take care of the books. I took thread and I bound the books around my waste and around my legs, making sure they wouldn't fall out. Then I told the Security Officers to come with me to put on my winter coat. Finally I was sure the books wouldn't be noticed. They started the search in my daughters' room, then in the other room, but they did not find anything else but four THE HARP OF GOD books and some Bibles.

They reported to their leader that they found no weapons. They did not search the hallway the leader was in. I was glad because I had there some kitchen cupboards, and the Fifth Volume was there because we had read out of it during the last meeting, but my husband had the time to cover it with his hat. On

the cupboard glass was written “The Happy Man.” He asked me, “What does this mean?” I said, “That is how we are.” Then he asked, “Why didn’t you ask for authorization to function, like the other cults have done?” I answered, “The time will come that you will take away their authorizations as well.” Then he said louder, “How do you know that?” Then I took the magazine THE BEE from the counter and told him, “I found that out from your magazine.” Then I read to them a verse from a poem that read, “I see the birth of a new world; A world anew, with no end; Where thrones and pulpits will be no more.” Then he told me, “How did you keep this magazine for two years? We need people like you!”

*The Difficulties that Followed the
Arrest of My Husband Lazar*

When they were about to take my husband away, I kissed him, but I did not cry (even though now at the age of 75, I cry while I write).

Why I didn't cry? Because the night before we had a very encouraging meeting. I felt like I shouldn't cry. It was like something was urging me: we should be able to go even to death for Christ.

It was already light outside when the Security Officers left with my husband and the other brethren. They took them to their van, while the people were watching, amazed, from their gates. Lazar's mother sent a neighbor to see what was happening with us, but the Security Officers didn't let her go back.

After they left, my husband's mother told me what happened at their house. Lazar's father told them, “You took my DAILY MANNA, but I am not leaving here before you read to me today's Manna, December 13.”

My beloved brethren, I think you know how special that Manna is— exactly corresponding to what was going on!⁽²⁾ When they took the four brothers away, a neighbor woman who was a Communist had the courage to say, “Why are you taking these good people from our village?” They said, “If you keep talking, we'll arrest you too!”

⁽²⁾ **Manna — December 13**

“‘Lay not this sin to their charge.’ Acts 7:60”

They got to the main road where a black van was waiting for the Lord’s faithful ones to take them where they were supposed to go.

*What Followed the
Arrest of My Husband*

The brethren that remained, including our children, were scared; but then we encouraged each other and had meetings in strictest secret. But the Communists kept under surveillance every step we took. One day they called our 15-year-old son—who lived with my mother-in-law—to their office and scared him very much.

Lazar’s mother had heart problems and kept crying, having to be separated from both her husband and her only son. After the sentence was given, she fell to the ground, had a heart attack and died, saying, “My beloved son, Lazar, where are you?”

One month after the arrest we were told to go to the Security in Oradea and take some socks and some clothes for the detainees. I went to the train station, 10 km (6 miles) by foot, took the train and finally arrived at the gate of the Oradea Security.

There were other people waiting and each of us had a petition in our hands. The guard came and took the petition from the first person, who was an 18-year-old boy who came to bring clothes for his father. He read it and he didn’t like the way it was written and started yelling at the poor boy, “You pig! Get out!” I will never forget how red the face of the boy was. He was from Beius, and his father never came home again as he had a liver illness and died in prison.

I was next, but seeing the way he was yelling at that boy, my heart started pounding heavily, but immediately I asked myself, “Why are you so scared? Didn’t you vow to go even to death for Christ?” Then I calmed down and gave my petition. He read it and took the package of clothes without saying anything.

The days passed slowly and I couldn’t sleep or eat. I was thinking of Lazar, how tired he was, and how hard he worked in the woods to cut wood for the Communists in order to be able to bring home a small portion. He gathered three piles, two for the state and one for us—but they ended up taking all three piles.

I started to lose weight, and I realized that something was not okay with me. I thought of going to the doctor to see if he would find something and then to ask for a petition for the Security to find out where my husband was.

When the doctor saw me, he said, “You are suspected of having tuberculosis in both lungs, and need to go to the sanatorium. That’s why you lost so much weight.”

The doctor gave me certification that I was sick, and I prepared a petition to take to the Oradea Court. In my request I formulated 38 points from Volume IV, which advocated the proletariat and the poor. I went one morning and stood face to face with the one who was investigating my husband’s case. He took my request and read it. I told him, “Our books are true, and they are about a true communism.” He answered bluntly, “Yes, I read them. But in Volume IV, I also found it against this regime: ‘Collectivism and Communism are not the remedy.’” Then he told me that my husband’s case was in his hand and in two weeks he would be judged. Then I asked him, “What is he being accused of?” He told me, “He has no authorization to preach. I warn you now that you are not allowed to witness to anybody. Especially for your husband, it is strictly forbidden to witness, because he is very intelligent and can prove anything. The Communist regime forbids him all liberties.”

The Condemnation of My Husband and of the Other Brethren from the Bihor County

On April 17, 1959, the Military Tribunal from Timisoara went to Oradea to judge twelve believers who did not deny their faith.

All the families of the prisoners came to the court. There was no transportation by car at that time, so I traveled in a wagon with all my family for 30 km (19 miles). We were all anxious to see the faces of our beloved family members.

When we arrived in the courtroom, they were already there, every one having a guard right behind him with the guard’s hand on his shoulders. I remember my younger daughters of 9 and 6 were very tired of riding in the wagon and fell asleep in the arms of my relatives. Lazar wanted to look at us, but the guard hit him.

He didn't feel good and asked for water. They gave him a pill and water and while he was taking them he was able to look at us for a moment. I will never forget that moment.

The Court Proceedings

Sr. Irina from Astileu was questioned first, and they asked her, “Who educated you in this religion? Lazar Fodor?” She answered, “Categorically, NO! I am older in this faith, and I taught him. I gave him the Volumes, which I obtained from Cluj and not from across the ocean, like you wrote in the report.”

My husband was next, and they asked him about the chart with the three worlds they had found during the house search. He explained the chart they were holding with their hands.

They asked all of them questions, and all answered well.

At the end they gave them their sentences. The first was my husband — 20 years of hard labor or 10 years of hard imprisonment with civic degradation and the confiscation of his wealth. Then a brother from Beius — 16 years; one from Oradea — 16 years; another one from Oradea — 15 years; one from Astileu — 12 years; Lazar's father — 12 years; two brethren from Cabesti — 10 years; one from Surduc — 10 years.

All of them had their wealth confiscated. We were surprised by these hard sentences.

After the Process

We left the courtroom and waited in the hallway to see our loved ones pass by. My husband was first and then all the others with their guards. When Lazar's mother, who was 58 years old, saw her son go by, even though we were not allowed to say anything, she couldn't abstain from saying, “Don't be discouraged, my son, because we are all well.” Then Lazar recognized her voice and turned his head toward his mother for a second, but the guard hit him so hard that he fell to the ground.

Finally, the drama was over and we had nothing to do other than go back home with our hearts bleeding, feeling like we were leaving our beloved in the hands of tyrants.

The Stresses that Overwhelmed Us Afterwards

The children and I were so tired that we fell asleep right away when we got home. But a few minutes later I woke up scared, asking, “Whoa! What has happened? 20 years...” Again I fell asleep and again I woke up repeatedly, until the morning came.

In the morning, I prayed to God and read the MANNA, and I was encouraged again.

The girls were asked by the people and at school if they had seen their father. They were not able to respond, but just cried.

This shock also passed and we had to get used to the long sentence. I also had to prepare for the Sanatorium and go with urgency. I made arrangements for my family and took the youngest daughter, age 6, to my mother in Tetche, 30 km (19 miles) away.

Spying at the Sanatorium

When I entered the Sanatorium, the doctor told me that I had to stay there a long time in order to recuperate. I encouraged myself saying that I could suffer anything, that it was not hard yet, feeling the Lord’s presence with me.

I did not tell the doctor my difficulties and I gave him 100 lei, as was the custom. They had no medicine to treat this illness so they treated it with pneumothorax (air to the lungs) and Hidrazide 16 times a day and 20 pills a day.

The next day a female Security Officer was hospitalized at the Sanatorium and took the bed beside mine. I had no idea who she was. But when the Security Officer went for a walk, the doctor came to my bed to see me and told me, “Be careful not to tell anybody that you gave me money because the woman who came today and took the bed besides yours is a Security Officer, and she came for a month of rest.”

The doctor did not know about my problems and was thinking that the Security Officer was after him, but I thanked God for His overruling. I had with me the MANNA and one Volume—and I placed them under my mattress immediately.

The days were passing one by one. It was the month of April, when all the peasants were going out in the fields to sow their seeds, and I had only just entered the rest period. After a week, my

girls—the 13- and the 9-year old ones—came to visit me in the Sanatorium and asked me who they should ask to sow the corn for us. (They had traveled 20 km [12.5 miles] by foot.) The Security woman who was spying on me saw them and brought food for them from the kitchen.

The girls went back home and kept writing to me. The Security Officer kept asking about my husband, but I knew what to tell her because I knew who she was. Then when she was walking with the other roommates, she asked them about me. They did not know that she was a Security Officer and they told her that they hated all the Security Officials in the country because they arrested such good people as my husband.

I would see her writing every day. She also read some of the letters my daughters were sending me, and she saw that we were simple peasants, condemned as if we were top government leaders.

Two weeks after my hospitalization, she was already convinced of whom I was and she completed her last duty. It was late at night, and everybody was sleeping in the room. She whispered to me, "Mrs. Fodor, are you sleeping?" I answered, "I'm not sleeping because I received a letter from home, where my oldest daughter writes that I should be calm because she is doing everything at home, and she is getting the little one ready for school. But how about you, you're not sleeping either?" "No," she said to me. "I have to tell you something you don't know. Do you know who I am? I am a Security Officer placed here for yourself and now I have reached a final conclusion as to who you are." Then she pulled up her nightshirt, took off her gun from her waist, and put it in her suitcase. When I saw that, I was shaken and was amazed at God's care for me, and I said, "Who am I, Lord, that you should care for me so much?"

Three months passed in the hospital, and I told the doctor about my difficulties and why I had to go home. He agreed and wrote me prescriptions to continue the treatment at home.

The Confiscations that Followed the Arrest of My Husband

After my return home, the Security authorities came to confiscate our assets. They took two cows that I used for pulling the yoke,

and they left the two that were small and weak. They allowed us to continue to live in the house, but made me sign a contract for us to rent three rooms and the kitchen, which would cost 43 lei per room per month. In addition I had to pay rent for the fourth room that they transformed into the village medical office.

I had to pay for the court expenses for the initial case, 500 lei, and then for recurrences 500 more lei. All these demands they asked of me. It was very difficult to pay because I had no source of income, but God gave me his peace and comfort. Every two weeks I would walk to Episcopia Bihorului—10 km (6 miles)—for air treatment for my lungs.

Lazar’s mother died shortly after I came home from the hospital. She had a heart attack and died crying for her son and her husband. Now I had to keep two households up and running.

What My Children Felt and the Difficulties That Followed

After I came home from the Sanatorium I met the Sheriff. He told me, “Mrs. Fodor, I will never forget your daughters. After you left for the hospital, I was given the order to spy on your house and your daughters every night and inform the Security if I observed anything unusual. I know well who you are, and therefore I protected you when they arrested your husband and did not tell them how your daughters threw the books out the window. But now I was obligated to go to your home. It was one o’clock in the morning. All the lights were off in the village—yours being the only one with the lamps on. I sent the night watch before me to announce my coming so that they would not be scared.

After entering the house, I was greatly surprised at what I found. The older girl was cutting weeds for the ducks, and the younger one was peeling potatoes. I asked them, “At this time of the night, when everybody is sleeping, you are working?” “Yes,” the older one said, “Because our daddy is in prison and our mother is in the sanatorium and tomorrow we have to sow the corn. I hired a man to work for us with his horses plowing the field, and my sister is going to school.”

And so the girls also survived and suffered.

About that time Br. Miklos came secretly to visit us and to comfort us and encourage us. It was at night, and he brought us a notebook where it was written about the condemnation of our Lord Jesus, who was also accused of plotting against the Jewish government. That was extremely encouraging!

Later, the brethren from Cluj sent a brother who was lame, to find out news about us. Even though he came secretly, the brother was caught and was taken to the Police station, which was three villages away from us.

We tried to find out by asking people what happened. The station Sheriff asked him where he was from, and he answered that he was from the village of Bica, Cluj county. The Sheriff was from the same village, and he realized that he was related to the brother! Here's what he told him, "I received an order to send you from police station to police station until you arrive in Cluj. But now, come with me and I will show you the way from here to the train station." He took him to the train, and he also gave him food for the trip back. Here we see God's help.

Days, months, and years passed. The other brethren who were imprisoned from our village were allowed to send letters and to receive a 5 kg. (11 lb.) package each month, but my husband did not have this right. He was kept in the cell and was not allowed to work.

Somebody told me that on June 1, the Children's National Day, the children were allowed to ask about their father. We immediately sent a letter to prison headquarters in Bucharest, and we received this answer, "Yes, your father lives, and he is fulfilling his sentence at one of Romania's prisons."

After four years of imprisonment, we received a postcard which said that my husband had the right to one 5 kg. (11 lb.) package once every two years.

I want to describe one of my mistakes, which found me unprepared. The difficulties were intensifying one after another, but I was not upset because every night I was studying and feeling that the Lord was with me. But here was a trial that showed my insufficiency.

Often I sang the hymn, "And even beaten by fate, I never cry." But I did come to cry and even in front of the authorities. Here is how it happened.

Every month I had to pay rent for the two rooms and the kitchen, which I was using. The fee was 45 lei per room. I also had to pay for the third room where the village medical office was set up.

One morning all the Communist village leaders—the Preceptor, the village Mayor and some policemen—came to my house to sequester it. I had not paid rent for the dispensary during the last six months, having already a very difficult time paying for our rooms.

Seeing this and being very upset, I started to cry and told the Mayor, “Mr. President, am I able to pay for the dispensary, me a woman suffering from tuberculosis? The children are minors and my husband was arrested.” And I cried desperately. The president had compassion on me and said, “Don’t punish this woman because I will file a request to cancel her duty of paying for the dispensary.”

Immediately after they left, I realized that I faltered because I had complained about my situation before the authorities. Why did I have to mention that my husband was arrested? They knew that too well! I went to my room and looked at my husband’s picture, then I fell down on my knees, crying and praying to God to forgive me. How could I, who was claiming to be ready even to die for Christ, bend under difficulties? The Lord saw my deficiency and forgave me by giving me courage again on the narrow way.

*The Investigation of the Brethren Imprisoned.
The Change of Verdict from ‘Crime’ to ‘Plotting’
and Other Details*

After three and a half years, the regime changed the verdict that was used to find the brethren guilty from ‘crime’ to ‘plotting,’ which implied an easier sentence. Those who had ten years received three; those with twelve received four; and those with fifteen to sixteen received five years; and my husband, who had twenty years received seven years.

So the Lord overruled that Br. Niculae Vese, having three years fulfilled, came home. Then, at four years came those with twelve years, among whom were Pavel Fodor (my father-in-law) and Br. Iancu.

We had great joy that they returned home faithful and were coming to the meetings. The meetings took place in great secret.

During the meeting, we would hide the books and would leave out only one at a time. The books they took when they searched the house, I had to transcribe by hand—an extract from the Towers and Volume III. Only during the night did I have time to write, but I rejoiced that I had them, because I loved them greatly.

*What the Brethren Told Us
About Their Experiences in Prison*

Yes, my father-in-law came home after four years—only to find that his wife had passed away.

Here is what he told us about the prisons when they took them from Oradea to Gherla. Those sentenced to many years were tied with chains. "I held Lazar's hand so he could walk while we passed the railroad tracks, and then we were separated. Those who had from 15 years up had heavy chains around their feet and could hardly get into the train. Those things would take place at night when there were no people at the train station. I have not seen Lazar since then."

He also told me that every month he was called and asked if he had re-educated himself regarding his faith in God.

"One time the guard came, put metal glasses over my eyes and told me, 'Come, I'm taking you to the interview!' He left me in the waiting room and went to bring others. We would stay there until we would hear our names. So when my turn came, I went in and heard him yelling, 'Your God is so and so....,' and he said all kinds of dirty words. Then he asked me, 'Do you still believe in this God?' Then I was so upset to hear those dirty words that I told him loudly and firmly, 'You can know, Sir, that even if my bones are left in this place, I will not abandon my God!' And I showed with my hand down to the ground. When the investigator heard that, he shouted loudly, 'Get out of here, you pig!....' And he swore at me.

"Next after me was a prisoner from the Lord's Army (a religious group). When he heard what took place, he fell down and fainted. They picked him up and took him to the medical office."

My father-in-law told me that they suffered three methods of extermination: cold, fatigue, and hunger. "They would give us 100 g (3.5 oz.) of bread and a piece of corn mush. After we would eat it all at once, we would get so hungry that the pain was as strong as a

toothache. I lost a lot of weight, so that I got down to 40 kg (88 lbs.). I was not able to stand up unless I would hold onto the bed.”

*What Followed: Trials and Testings,
Encouragement and Discouragement*

The time passed more easily after we saw that the brethren were coming home faithful. The people of the village, seeing that they returned, praised God for delivering them from the many difficulties they went through.

However, I was still waiting for the time to pass to see my beloved husband come home.

Meanwhile, the Communist regime was heavily burdening the peasants. I was left alone to work the land, but at the end not even the weeds were growing—let alone the crops. Because I had no strength to fertilize it and to plow with the oxen, the ground produced nothing. When my husband came home, he found us with only one cow.

But there was one Gethsemane-like testing that I had two years before Lazar came home. And I said, “Lord, please, if possible, take this cup from me!”

Here is how it happened: I was going regularly to get an air treatment for my lungs, every two weeks. One day the doctor told me that I had to be hospitalized to receive injections. But after I finished taking the injections, they caused a toxic reaction in my body, which attacked my cerebellum. When I got up to go and pick up the hospital release form, I saw black before my eyes, and my legs were staggering. The doctor called immediately for other doctors to make an analysis. The diagnosis was that I was experiencing toxic drug reaction. While I was lying in bed, I was fine. The problem would manifest itself only when I would get up. So I had to stay a long time in the hospital.

And while I was laying in bed, all kinds of thoughts would come to me. What if I would never be able to walk again and would have to stay in bed for the rest of my life? My husband would come home needing somebody to take care of him. How would he be able to take care of me after so many years of suffering? Thus, I had all kinds of thoughts in my mind regarding the future.

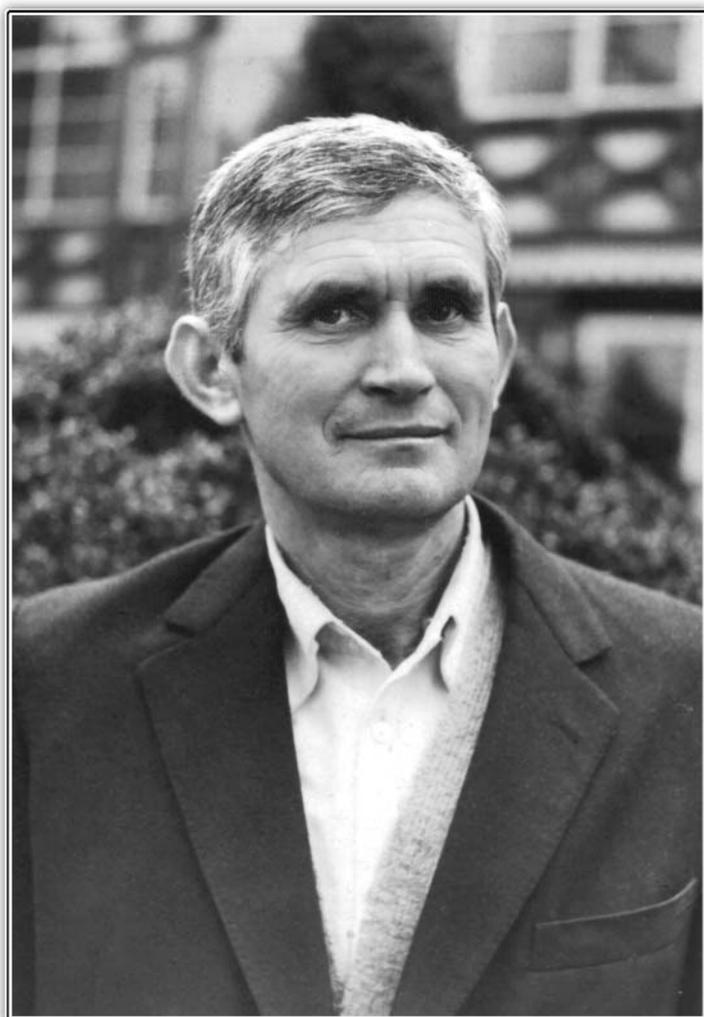
And for three days I lay in bed praying and crying, saying, “Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?” Through all the difficulties I went

through, I felt the hand of God with me, and now, I was desperate, as if I would have to solve all the problems myself. I did not lean on the Lord's arm.

After three days, a friend of mine came to see me at the hospital. I told him about my situation, and he told me, “Don't worry! Somebody in our village had the same problem but after a year it was all gone.” Then he encouraged me by saying that my husband would come home, and I would rejoice. Gradually, I got out of bed and started walking little by little, holding onto the walls or being helped by others. My courage returned. I asked for forgiveness from the Father because I had worried for three days about the future and did not put my trust in Him.

Even though the doctor did not want to let me go, I asked for permission to go home. For a year, I walked close to the walls because I had lost control of my legs. After a year, I was able to walk again on the street—if somebody would hold me. Then, every day I would get better. But even now, as I am writing, I still feel the dizziness.

Finally, the year, day, and much-awaited hour arrived. In 1964, in June, my husband received a pardon from seven years, to five years and two weeks. I saw him coming down the middle of the road, surrounded by people who were holding his hands. The entire road, from ditch to ditch, full of people! In this way the Lord had brought him home to me—may God be praised forever and ever that all this has passed! Amen.



Nelu Galis (Born 1935)

SEVENTH MEMOIR

“THE SKY SEEN THROUGH BARS”

NELU GALIS — RUGINOASA

“You have no idea how beautiful the sky is when seen through bars!” says Br. Nelu. The expression startled me. When you have the freedom to look at the sky any hour of the day or night with its entire expanse, you do not realize the privilege you enjoy. But when you cannot see more than a small piece of it—and this from behind bars—the sky gains a special new beauty.

Br. Nelu needs no introduction. You could hardly find a brother in Romania who does not know him!

Not having a family, Br. Nelu consecrated his entire life to the Truth and to the brethren. He has traveled extensively, preaching the Word, encouraging the brethren, suffering persecutions—all with the same zeal and tireless enthusiasm. He is one of the most active brethren we have ever met. Truly, he is consumed in the service of the Great King.

Through his character and life, Br. Nelu is an example of rare idealism.

(After much insistence, because he doesn't like to talk about himself, we obtained from Br. Nelu the following material. The section divisions are ours; otherwise, we have tried to maintain his testimony as close to the original as possible.)

Persecution by the Orthodox Church before Communism

From the information I received from the older brethren, the Truth was known in the Almas Valley from 1912-1913, before World War I.

In the village of Lapug, now Ruginoasa, and in Stobor, a neighboring village, there were Baptist brethren. In Stobor there was a brother named Gheorghe Amaru (nicknamed “Amaru,” meaning Poor), who was the Minister for the Baptist church for the entire Almas Valley up to Jibou.

Br. Gheorghe’s son recounts how Br. Szabo from America, sent by Br. Russell, stayed in Stobor for two weeks to talk to Br. Gheorghe. He remembers how the children would stay late at night behind the stove and listen to the two of them talk, while the table was full of books. Both of them knew Hungarian so they were able to communicate.

After this time, both of them went to Lapug and preached the Truth, and the first two classes of Bible Students in the Almas Valley were formed.

About Br. Gheorghe Amaru from Stobor, it is said that once while he was going to the meeting in Lapug, he met with a priest who was going the opposite direction to the church in Stobor. The priest slapped him in the face after which Br. Gheorghe answered very graciously. The priest then said, “Oh, poor you!” The deacon of the priest who was present started to call him “The Poor from Stobor,” and this remained his nickname.

The brethren and the old villagers recount a great immersion service that took place during those days in the valley of Lapug. There were many people and there were tents made out of flowery bedspreads where those who were being baptized could change clothes. There were very many immersed.

This was the beginning—and then the Truth spread to the south in the Almas Valley, in the localities of Bozolnic, Sutor, Chendremal, Zimbor, Dol, Sanmihai, Sanpetru, Almas, etc. I love to tell about the beautiful beginnings of the Bible Students, which later left “flowers of remembrance” for us also. At the place I was told this baptism took place more than 80 years ago, I like to organize Bethel services to spend moments of pleasant memories and to refresh my soul with reflections of those times.

Sr. Marie from Dol, who finished her earthly journey a few years ago, was telling me about an experience from 1923-25. There was a meeting in Bozolnic and the gendarmes came there and arrested many, beat them, and kept them detained. They asked her, "What are you doing here, Mrs. Marie? Why didn't you stay home?" Later, the leaders of the gendarmes who led that action got very sick and said, "I am dying because I beat the Protestants."

Between 1940 and 1944, under Hungarian domination, the brethren were persecuted by the Hungarian gendarmes. In Stobor during a funeral, a gendarme got up on the coffin and drove away the brethren.

Br. Danila Macauan told how many brethren were detained and beaten during that period. Br. Danila was tied up with a rope, and they would pick him up by the rope and beat him severely. When he was freed, he was all black and blue. Sometimes the brethren were turned in by priests and were accused of being Communists. In this way Br. Gligoras from Caian was arrested.

After the Hungarian domination passed, the brethren continued to be pursued by the Romanian authorities. In Tamasa Mare at a big meeting, the Romanian gendarmes arrested the speakers and some of them were condemned by the Cluj Tribunal to months or years in prison.

About that time, Br. Macauan went to Cluj to visit our brethren who were imprisoned. In the center of the city there was a large public gathering taking place, and Petru Groza, the president from The Plowers Party, was giving a speech where he was showing that now the people have many rights. Then Br. Danila said with a loud voice, "Mister President, you were saying that there is freedom. Why then do have I ten brothers in prison for their faith here in Cluj?" Then Groza gave the order to have them freed.

Under the Communist Regime

With the rise of Communism, the priests' authority was weakened. But then the brethren started being persecuted by the Communists.

During the years 1958-1959, many brethren from the area of Cluj, Dej, and Bihor were judged by the court and sentenced to many years of prison (up to 25 years), with confiscation of their wealth, no right to visitors, and no right to keep in touch with their families.

They were condemned under the accusation of crime against the Communist arrangement. Some of these brethren were: Danila Macauan from Chendremal (this brother was imprisoned multiple times under the Hungarian occupation and under the Communist Regime); Vasile Pop from Starci; Lazar Fodor; Iancu Petrita; Andrei Monenciu from Bihor; Br. Codreanu, the father of Sr. Irina from Cabesti; Br. Bote from Cluj; Alexandru Mogojan from Ocna Dejului; Dionisie Moraru from Petrosani (who was imprisoned a J.W. but received the Truth while in prison, where he was also baptized); and, also, Sr. Irina from Astileu.

However, in 1964 all the brethren were freed from prison. From what they told me, I know they were tortured as political prisoners. For investigation, they were transported using chains and handcuffs, with metal glasses on their eyes so they couldn't see. Then they were taken for heavy labor to Balta Brailei for heavy labor and were deprived of food. Many Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned together with our brethren.

Meanwhile, we know that the “Viata” Society was dissolved and the separation from the Witnesses took place. Br. Onisim Filipoiu from Sibiu printed Volume VI in a cellar in the locality of Sadu. Sr. Mariuca Rosca was telling me that she visited him at home and found him eating only some cold cornmeal. The sister of Elena Filipoiu—Br. Jacob Filipoiu's wife—kept guard by watching. When somebody would pass by, she would hit her foot against the floor—because they were doing the printing work clandestinely. In this way we had Volume VI, by the help of which we grew spiritually and refreshed ourselves.

How I Came to Know the Truth

After the release of the brethren from prison in 1964, meetings were still forbidden, and the brethren were not allowed to travel and visit other brethren. Nevertheless, meetings were taking place in small circles.

During that year—without being baptized yet—I started going to the Baptist Church in Manastur District, city of Cluj. Some Jehovah's Witnesses started to visit me, and I stopped going to the Baptists.

A brother from Ruginoasa, Gheorghica, who was paralyzed at that time, saw that the Jehovah's Witnesses were coming to visit me and said that he wanted to give me a book to read. It was the Sixth Volume. I took it and read it, after which I said, "Whoever wrote this book is a man of God, and I will never abandon his teachings." Then I talked to the Jehovah's Witnesses and asked them if they had the teachings of Br. Russell, to which they answered, "Yes. He is the seventh messenger, and all his teachings were good in his time." I did not understand then what they meant by "in his time." I found out later, after talking to our brethren, Br. Gheorghica and Br. Vasile Crisan from Gilau, who explained to me what this meant and how "the light increased." When the Witnesses visited me again, I asked them some questions to which they had no answers. Then I told them that I would remain with the teachings of Br. Russell.

I was baptized in 1965 by Br. Vasile Crisan and Gheorghe from Gilau. The first meetings I participated in were in Cluj with Bros. Nucu, Moraru, Bote and Surducan. I traveled to Gilau, Garbau, Aghires Factories, Zalau and Arghis, visiting the brethren.

On December 30, I went to the first meeting in Sighet and took with me my tape recorder. (These were the first recorded discourses of the brethren.) Br. Sabau from Miti Valley and Br. Lazar Fodor spoke. In Sighet we had our big meetings on holidays, such as 1st of May, 23rd of August, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Sr. Mariuca Rosca, during my beginnings in this faith, was sending me letters at my work through her brother-in-law (not through the postal service because that method would be dangerous). These were of great help to me. Many are the beautiful experiences I went through after I found this treasure of Truth with the brethren.

The Arrest and the Trial

During 1968-69, we started organizing public meetings in the Almas Valley, in the villages of Bozolnic, Tamasa, Almas, Ruginoasa, Mierta, Sutor, Dol, and Chendremal. Sometimes the police would come to threaten us. Then they started to penalize us little by little. But then we were hoping that it would continue this way—with only threats and reasonable fines.

But on the 5th of April in Ruginoasa, while we were having a big meeting, one of the village priest’s helpers called the Security. Four Security Officers and some policemen showed up during the meeting and asked for our permit to function. When we told them that we did not have one, the Sheriff said, “If you don’t have one, I am god here!” And the search started. Every one of the brothers—but less so the sisters—had to show his identity card and was searched. They confiscated hymnbooks, Mannas, Bibles, Volumes, and the tape recorder. Then they turned everything upside down and searched everywhere—except the table on which they were writing their case! Actually, in this table’s drawer were Volumes I, IV, V, and VI! And so the Lord delivered these Volumes from their hands. Many hymnbooks were saved because they were thrown out of the window and others were hidden in the chimney. I had seventeen tapes recorded, all of which they found, and they took them. In fact, these tapes proved valuable for us during the investigation, because the authorities could hear that the brethren did not speak evil against the authorities and had no secrets.

Nevertheless, after a while, they started to put together a court case. The second day they went and searched the homes of Br. Cornel Negrea in Mierta and Br. Augustin Pop from Sampetru. They took everything they found, and put together a case in order to arrest them.

Time passed until July 17, 1970, during which time they were trying to collect information from witnesses. On this particular day, though, we were called to go to the police station in Cuzaplac, and I took my bike because I did not know that they would arrest me.

When I got there, they took my bike and ordered me to go into the Security Officer’s car. In the back seat was Br. Cornel, who was also arrested. He was like an angel for me! He strengthened me, and my fear went away.

When we arrived in Cluj at the Military Tribunal, we saw Br. Augustin Pop from Sampetru, who had also been arrested. They arrested him just as he had gotten home from his work in Rajnov (near Brasov).

The commander of the Tribunal recorded our declarations, asking what we believed and what we expected to take place on the earth.

Among other things, we told them that soon the Kingdom of God would begin to be manifested on earth—which would have its capital in Jerusalem—where the prophets would be resurrected. Then all the earth would become a paradise, and all the people would go in great numbers to the Lord’s mountain.

At the end, the secretary read my declaration that I had to sign. But she had added that with the kingdom coming, the Socialist Republic of Romania and the government of the Communist Party would no longer be. I didn’t want to sign it, and told them that I had mentioned nothing about Romania and its government. The Commander then asked me to give a declaration that Romania and the Communist Party would remain—a statement that I wasn’t able to sign. Then I changed the declaration to say that all the nations, Romania included, would enter into the Kingdom.

From Cluj they took us to Zalau where they interrogated us for 30 days. Only on the first day did they ask us questions about ourselves. The rest of the time they asked for information about other brethren. With whom did we meet? Who was at which meeting? Who spoke? etc.

During all this time we were isolated from each other. They took declarations from each, which they were comparing to see if we told the truth. In the cell we were not supposed to sit on the bed during the day, and the light was permanently turned on. They would take us outside for walks for 15 minutes every day, in a space of 4 x 6 meters (13 x 20 ft). There, I loved to look at the sky.

Inside, I would communicate with Br. Cornel through the wall, greeting him by tapping three times, and he would answer if he had not been taken for investigation.

After a month they took all three of us, put us in a car and took us to the prison in Cluj. They gave us used striped clothes (with at least 10 patches each) and put us in a smoky cell without beds or chairs. There were only some wooden boards that were folded up during the day and brought down for the night. We thought that this was life in prison, but they did this only to scare us.

Toward the evening they took us out, gave us better striped clothing and put us in cells with beds, mattresses, pillows and blankets. There were seven or eight of us, among whom was a detainee with a wooden leg (whom we found out later was their spy). We received 125 grams (4.4 oz.) of bread and a piece of cornmeal daily.

Our Cell Number 12 held the political prisoners. All the rest of them were for common criminals. But during the day we had to wash the floors for the common criminals’ cells.

All three of us being in the same cell, I learned “My Morning Resolve” and “A Vow unto the Lord” from Br. Augustin, who knew both of them by heart. We were there for about two months, and then the sentence followed.

Many brethren were in the Tribunal Room on that day. The defense lawyer tried to defend us, but the prosecutor came on very strongly against us. At the end the judge asked us if, after we had served our sentences, we would continue in this faith. All of us responded that whatever would happen we would continue in it. Finally, they gave us the sentences: Br. Augustin was condemned to five years, Br. Cornel to six, and I got eight years. We found out later that these sentences were decided in advance by the Security and were only communicated at the proceedings.

Cry for Joy

During the investigation and the trial, we counted it as a great blessing to be held accountable for a faith and a Truth so wonderful and to be arrested and condemned to prison for it. Sometimes we would cry for joy. The sky seen through bars was very beautiful. In there we felt the loving protection of our Father and of dear Lord Jesus much more even than when we were out in freedom.

I remember that after we put on our new striped clothes and the three of us met again and saw each other in our new clothes, we actually started to cry for joy!

When I recalled the joy I felt when seeing the faces of my beloved brethren and sisters during the trial—I received great encouragement through them, too.

We were joyful also, because during the investigation and trial we were able to testify about our precious and wonderful Truth. If we would have renounced it, they would have freed us immediately, but the Lord protected us from this fall. And, even though I made my mistakes, I repented and asked the Father to forgive me and to attribute to myself the merit of our Lord Jesus.

Even though we refused to appeal, our families did. So we went to Bucharest by train in a small 1m x 1m cell (3.3 x 3.3 ft), being thus separated from the prisoners for common crimes. But we were very happy together. After arriving at the Vacaresti Prison, we stayed for almost two months. Then we were taken to the Supreme Tribunal and we were assigned a woman lawyer. While she was skimming through the documents for our cases, we caught glimpses of the pictures of some brethren—and we rejoiced! The judge did not talk long with us before he said that the sentence given in Cluj was good. Here, too, we had brethren who came and supported us: my father, Sr. Dina . . . the wife of Br. Augustin . . . the son of Br. Cornel . . . Br. Puiu and others.

When we returned to the Vacaresti Prison, a policeman brought us in front of a big garbage can and asked us to go inside it—because he said that was the only place we were good for. We did not go in.

After we returned to the cell, we met with other prisoners who were Jehovah's Witnesses with whom we talked extensively. The situation here was better than in Cluj. The food was better, and the walk was thirty minutes long. We were all happy and were waiting to be brought to Aiud where we would fulfill our sentences.

During all this time, we were able to sing ("Wherever with Jesus," "Always on the Lord's Path," etc.) and to pray together. When the first sergeant would hear us, he would yell, "What is this? A church?" But he wouldn't do anything else. Beautiful memories have remained with us from this Vacaresti Prison also.

In Prison

I was taken to Aiud one month sooner than Br. Cornel and Br. Augustin.

Arriving there during the night, we passed through three gates before we arrived at the cell I was assigned to. This prison was only for political detainees accused of propaganda against the Socialist order. Its name was Zarca, and it was built during the life of Queen Maria Tereza, during the Austro-Hungarian order. The prison had the shape of a train, a long corridor with cells on each side.

Here I met other detainees: Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, Pentecostals and Priests. In the morning an Adventist brother came to the door and looked through the peephole, asking, "Who is the

millennialist brother that came last night?” And he offered me cookies and a jar of jam!

Every day we were taken to work. First, I worked on making boxes for storing the crops of the fields; then I worked on making binders. At the end I worked in a workshop making sofas.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses started asking me all kind of questions, which I had difficulty answering being young in the Truth and without experience. I could hardly wait for the other two brethren to come from Bucharest. They were able to answer them better and without fear. Gradually, I learned to defend the Truth so that now I wanted to talk to the Witnesses, but they were not interested anymore.

Somehow we were able to obtain a pencil—1cm long—and someone obtained a New Testament. When we had a “good guard,” we would copy Psalms, chapters from the epistles and parts of the Gospels on the paper the chocolate was packaged in. Then we would work on memorizing what we had copied. And so the news spread throughout the whole prison that Br. Cornel knew the entire Bible by heart. The Lord performed wonders with us, and we learned there what we probably would not have been able to learn in freedom. We went through experiences that taught us wonderful lessons.

On Sundays in the cell, our thoughts went to the brethren who were meeting together outside. I would remember the meetings I attended when I was at home where I had many occasions to fellowship about this precious Truth.

In the workshop I was with the brethren, and we had our meals together as well. This way I had the opportunity to learn hymns from Br. Cornel, who knew them by heart. Sometimes many of us in the workshop would sing. One time a sergeant came by and asked who was singing. One of the Christians said that he was the one. “Why?” the sergeant asked. “To calm my soul.” In this way he saved us.

One time a colonel from Bucharest came while we were working in the shop, and when he was in our work area he asked, “Are these the millennialists from Zalau? Is the Millennium coming?” We answered, “Of course it’s coming, Mr. Commander.” He didn’t answer and moved on.

I remember how nervous I was when they wanted to move us to another cell. I heard a call, “Everybody out!” I had hidden papers in the mattress on which I wrote verses. I barely had time to take them

out of the mattress when, a few seconds later, the officer came in to search the cell. But the Lord protected me and helped me take them to another cell where I could read them.

Other brethren came to visit us in prison—but they were not allowed to see us. Only our immediate families were allowed. However, if there was a considerate first sergeant on duty, sometimes other visitors were allowed. That was the way Sr. Calina and Sr. Irina from Sighet were able to come in and talk to us. That made me very happy. But when Sr. Calina came again, together with Br. Nicu from Sampetru, they were taken to the commander’s office and were questioned and threatened with imprisonment.

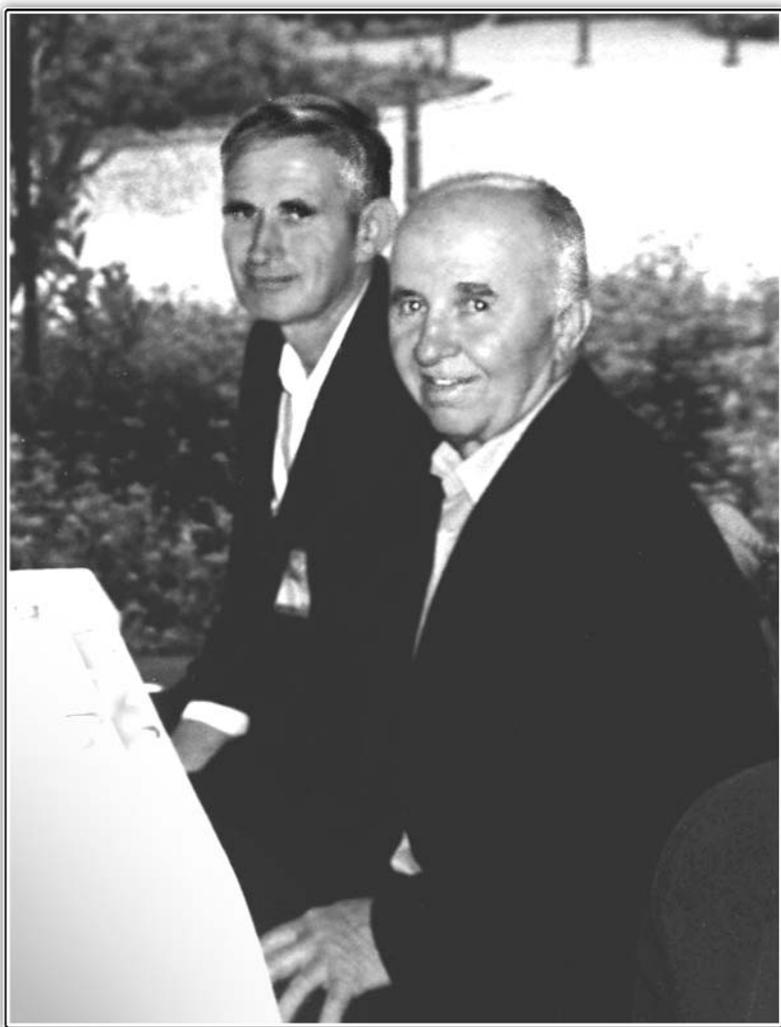
Though it is true that many times I was nervous in front of the officers, I was never without the Lord’s help.

Liberation

We were arrested in 1970 and were freed with a decree in 1974. Br. Augustin was freed in the spring of 1974, and I was freed in the fall.

Just before our release when we were working in the shop, the first sergeant called us to return all the tools. He then took us to our cell to gather our personal belongings. They searched us and threatened us that if we would continue in our faith, we would come back there.

We were thankful that we had remained faithful during all that time—even though we had continual need of the Lord’s merit to cover our mistakes. The Father had mercy on us and kept us from falling. To Him we bring our thanks from the depth of our hearts.



Right: Cornel Negrea (1920-2004)

EIGHTH MEMOIR

“MUCH JOY IS OURS”

CORNEL NEGREA — MIERTA

With a soft facial expression revealing a great internal calmness and a clear and warm heart, Br. Cornel from Mierta (as he was known to the brethren) was one of the most prominent figures among Bible Students in the Almas Valley. His calm voice exuded an unexpected force when he began singing. In fact, he was the hymn leader at Conventions. Yet, his talent was not limited to that ability. The fact is well known that he even composed hymns. Having an exceptional memory, he also knew the Truth very well.

The report below—after much insistence—was obtained by gathering information from Br. Cornel Negrea, who did not want to talk too much about his own experiences (not wanting to be interpreted as boasting).

The father of Br. Cornel, who had a profound religious spirit, was Orthodox. During World War I, while in Russia, he came in contact with a Baptist and decided to convert to Protestantism. When he returned from the War in 1918, he came in contact with our brethren who had lived in his village, Mierta, since 1912. Together with his wife, he consecrated.

With this background, Br. Cornel came to be born into a family of believers—even though his mother died six months after his birth. At a very young age, his father took him to meetings and entertained brethren, and so the spirit of the Truth penetrated his mind.

Nevertheless, Br. Cornel had spent his youth in the world, where he married at 19 to an Orthodox girl. At the beginning of World War II, he enlisted in the military. Then in the middle of the War, he remembered God and what he had learned in his childhood, and he decided to consecrate. One year passed after he returned home before the fulfillment of that resolution in 1945.

Since 1947, at the same time as the ascension of Communism and its assumption of power, the restrictions began. Especially in the Almas Valley, the regime was very severe. More than a few times the Security appeared in the middle of the meetings, confiscating books and issuing fines.

Being young, the militia tried to pull Br. Cornel into a trap, asking him to become their informer. This move was the usual tactic of the Communists—and not only in the religious sphere; but he refused categorically.

Once Br. Nelu Galis organized a big meeting at his home in Ruginoasa. The brethren were caught by the Security Officers, and after having to give some declarations, they were put on a penal list to be spied on by them.

Not long after that episode, Br. Cornel received a citation where he was asked to go to the police department in a neighboring village. There he found Br. Nelu! They were both arrested and taken to the Cluj tribunal, where a chain of exhausting investigations began. Finally, they were condemned under the accusation that they were making propaganda against the Socialist order—because they were proclaiming a Kingdom on earth that would replace all present orders.

They were taken from Cluj to Zalau, and then back to Cluj, where they were judged and sentenced: Br. Cornel to six years, Br. Nelu to eight years and Br. Augustin Pop from Sampetru to five years. They were all sent together to the prison in Aiud where they actually stayed for four years and three months.

With tearful eyes, Br. Cornel told us how astonished he was when he was arrested.

"I had never imagined before," he said, "that God would find me worthy of suffering for the Truth. I never thought that I—being so insignificant—would have to suffer imprisonment and mocking for Him."

He acknowledged that the prison years were the richest spiritual time in his life. He said, “I don’t even know where those four years have gone—they went so fast and easily!”

Together with our brethren, there were seventy-five Jehovah’s Witnesses sentenced to prison. Some of them received jars of jam and honey from their families—but inside of them there were thin sheets of papers with chapters from the Bible! These scriptures were copied on chocolate wrappers, but then were destroyed because there were frequent searches. For every pencil or piece of paper found, the prisoners were severely punished.

During work hours, the brethren would continually repeat the verses learned, and during their walk they would listen to one another’s verses. These verses were also helpful during their doctrinal discussions.

Br. Cornel remembers with pleasure the moments when he and Br. Nelu were singing together in prison. There he composed a hymn, “Much Joy Is Ours.”

Br. Cornel’s exceptional memory made him famous in prison as having the best knowledge of the Bible.

Br. Nelu made this observation about him.

It appears that Br. Cornel has only beautiful memories from his detention years. He did not talk to us about the difficult conditions and sufferings—but about the joys of those years.

When asked to address a message to the younger generation, Br. Cornel said:

“Do not be afraid of anything—difficult experiences, sufferings, not even death. We know that this body must be left in death. We love the young people, and we see that the Lord raises faithful people at all times. May it be that you will keep your faith to the end!”



If in a difficult hour we will receive encouragement because we have remembered a detail from the lives of these brethren, then this book will have reached its mission abundantly.

(Quoted from Page 140)

CHAPTER NINE OF MEMOIRS

OUR LEGACY OF MEMOIRS FOR A DIFFICULT HOUR AHEAD

Many other brethren, no doubt, might have had their testimonies recorded along with these eight precious Memoirs. But these included were the reports that were accessible at this time.

Even though their expressions are sometimes awkward, we recorded their words in simplicity to keep this record as authentic as possible. This approach is very important—because it allows us to understand the way in which God worked at that time for a certain purpose. It also helps us to appreciate the faith, courage, steadfastness and long suffering expressed through the sufferings of some of our fellow warriors.

The same brethren who exhibited these virtues testified with humility to the fact that they were subject to mistakes . . . that they have not always measured up to the divine standards . . . that often they have cried bitterly realizing their faults and weaknesses. In those times they have cried for help. They received it, and God continued to work in their lives—giving them the courage and the strength to continue.

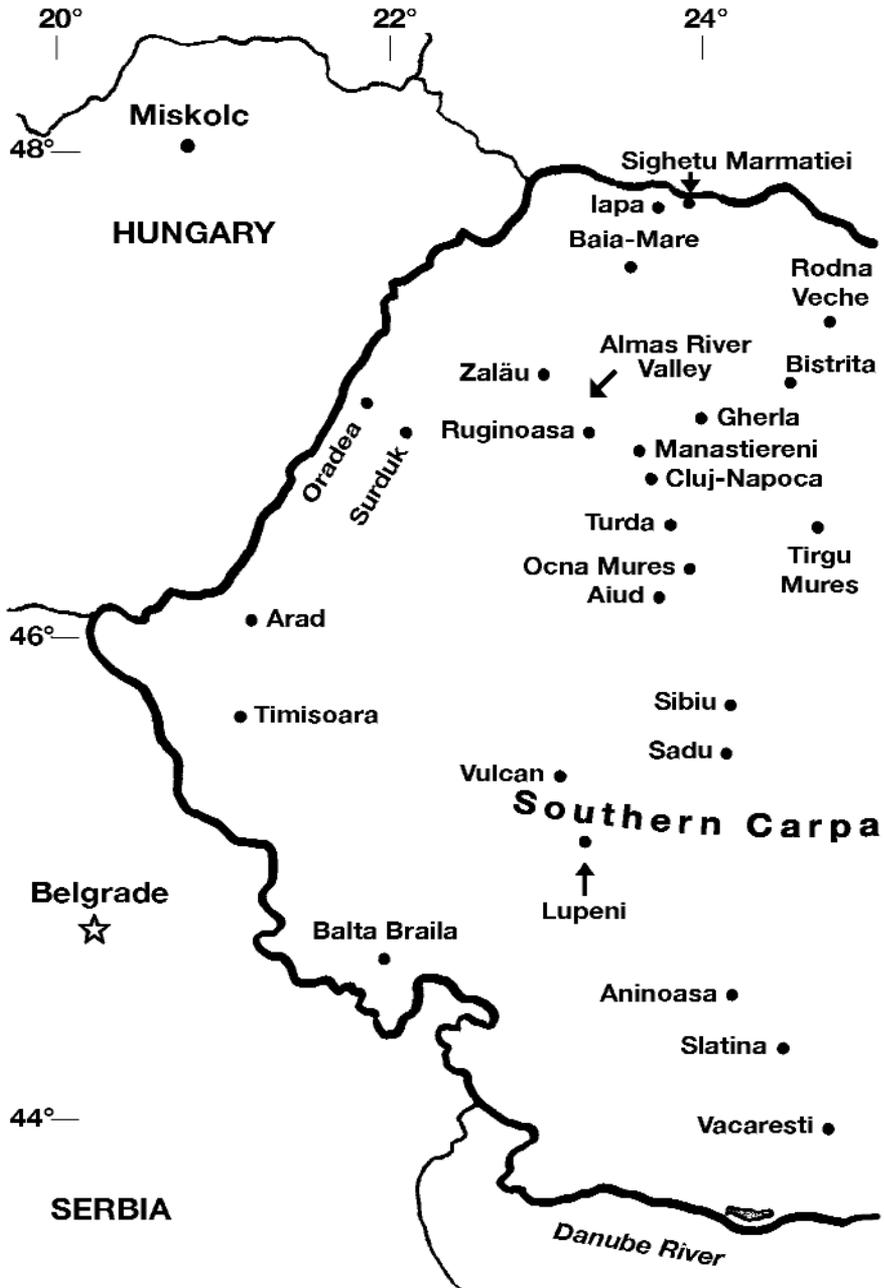
Living in our times, we are tempted to believe that we are protected by the law and man's rights represent an unbreakable guarantee. In other words, we are comforted by the thought that such calamities cannot happen to us—confiscation of our assets and property, falsified court cases, unjust sentences, condemnation to limited freedom—or prison—for years, harsh and sometimes

inhumane corporal treatment. It is possible that these things will not happen to us.

But still, more than ever before, as we press toward the full establishment of the Kingdom, the travail of history is likely to intensify again. But we are confident that if God will permit such experiences that we do not expect in the present time, we will not be taken by surprise. If we can remember the example of these warriors of faith—and the promises and hopes they clung to—we can be ready and faithful.

If in a difficult hour we will receive encouragement because we have remembered a detail from the lives of these brethren, then this book will have reached its mission abundantly.

The One who worked in His saints throughout the Gospel Age, the One who worked with the brethren in this book—may He also work in us so that whatever we will have to go through, we will bring honor to His name!



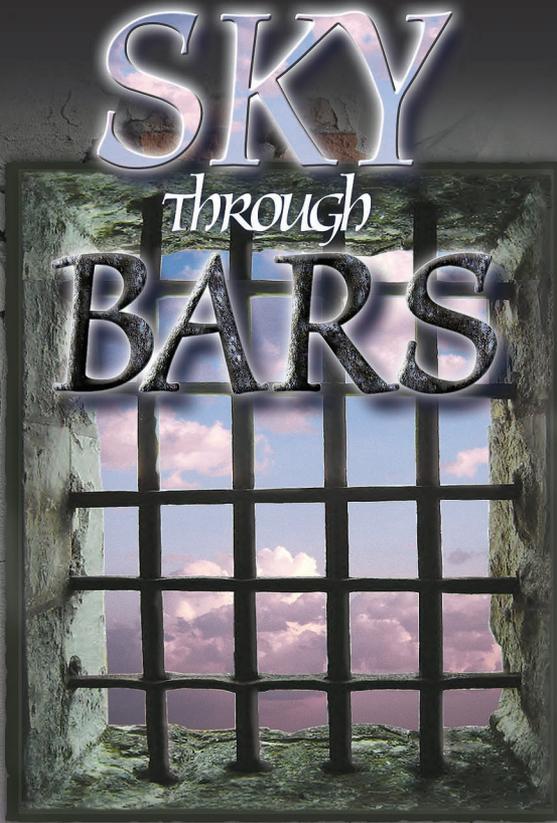


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When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
nor will the flame burn you. Since you are precious in My
sight, since you are honored and I love you... Isaiah 43:2, 4

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